United Nations S/PV.6061

Security Council

Sixty-fourth year

Provisional

6061 st meeting

Tuesday, 6 January 2009, 5 p.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Kouchner	(France)
Members:	Austria	Mr. Spindelegger
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Kafando
	China	Mr. Zhang Yesui
	Costa Rica	Mr. Ballestero
	Croatia	Mr. Jurica
	Japan	Mr. Takasu
	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Mr. Shalgham
	Mexico	Mr. Heller
	Russian Federation	Mr. Yakovenko
	Turkey	Mr. Babacan
	Uganda	Mr. Butagira
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Miliband
	United States of America	Ms. Rice
	Viet Nam	Mr. Le Luong Minh

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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09-20097 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 5.20 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite the representatives of Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Norway, Qatar and Saudi Arabia to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian National Authority, whom I welcome, to participate in this meeting in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I propose, with the consent of the Council, to extend an invitation to participate in this meeting, under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, to His Excellency Mr. Amre Moussa, Secretary General of the League of Arab States.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

This is a moment of great urgency. The international community is mobilizing, as attested to by the presence of President Abbas, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States and Ministers from Arab States, countries members of the Council and other States. The number of victims is in the hundreds, and in the thousands if the wounded are included. Many are civilians. Just today we have seen the tragedy at the Al-Fakhoura School, near Jabaliya. In the face of that tragedy, my country has decided to do everything possible to bring an end to the violence.

Following two days of discussions in the region — in Sharm el-Sheikh, Jerusalem, Ramallah, Damascus and again in Sharm el-Sheikh — the President of the French Republic has achieved the undertaking of negotiations on a permanent ceasefire. At a press conference with President Sarkozy, President Mubarak has in fact just proposed a plan aimed at finding a way out of the crisis. In particular, President Mubarak has called for Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Palestinian factions to meet in order to take every step necessary to end the escalation, including border security and the reopening of border crossings. We await Israel's response, but we have the hope that it will be positive. The Security Council should encourage and support those promising efforts. All States of the region should support this momentum and contribute to this hopeful initiative aimed at moderation and restraint.

The immediate priority is to end the violence. My country has condemned Israel's ground offensive against Gaza, just as it has condemned the continued launching of rockets. We call for an immediate humanitarian truce. The fate of civilians is the most urgent concern.

France reiterates is call for a complete and immediate cessation of rocket launchings, and for a halt to all Israeli military operations. France would also like to reiterate the need to establish the necessary conditions and guarantees for a lasting ceasefire, the main elements of which are well-known. They include supervision of the implementation of the ceasefire; a return to normality in Gaza, which includes the permanent opening of crossing points; and a halt to the smuggling of weapons into Gaza. International oversight mechanisms may prove to be necessary, and we are prepared to contribute to them.

Beyond that, it remains crucial to return to peace negotiations. There is no military solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, not in Gaza or anywhere else. The solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must be based on the process charted at Annapolis and on the establishment of a viable Palestinian State living side by side with Israel in peace and security. In particular, we must work on the basis of the Arab Peace Initiative to address the Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Arab conflicts in a comprehensive and practical manner.

Europe encourages the essential reconciliation that must take place among Palestinians. We support efforts by everyone to that end.

France has acted with all its partners in the international community, in particular those in the European Union, to put an end to this crisis. My country believes that the Security Council has an essential role to play, which should take into account the reality of the situation on the ground in order to effectively establish the conditions for a lasting ceasefire. In that regard, I shall listen to the various statements to be made here. I hope that we will be able to take decisive action in the Council in support, in particular, of Egypt's efforts, as well as those of the League of Arab States committee and others, along the two fronts that I have outlined, namely, an immediate halt to violence and the establishment of the necessary conditions for a lasting ceasefire.

I welcome the presence among us of His Excellency Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, to whom I give the floor.

The Secretary-General: As the Council meets to address the grave crisis in Gaza, I welcome the leader of the Palestinian people, President Mahmoud Abbas, who is recognized by the members of this body as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. His presence, and that of high-level representatives of members of the Security Council, as well as of Arab and other Member States, is a reminder that we must move from debate to action, and must do so immediately.

The situation on the ground demands nothing less. The Israeli military operation, with the stated purpose of bringing an end to rocket attacks by Hamas militants and a change in the security conditions in southern Israel, is in its eleventh day. Israel has intensified its air bombardment and sea attacks into Gaza. These attacks have caused damage and destruction both to Hamas militants' facilities and to public infrastructure, mosques, schools and homes.

Hamas militants have continued to fire rockets at Israel, most recently reaching 30 kilometres from Tel Aviv. Three days ago, in a further escalation, Israeli troops entered the Gaza Strip. There have been fierce clashes in heavily populated areas, including in and around Gaza City and in refugee camps.

According to the Palestinian Ministry of Health and media sources, over 570 Palestinians have already been killed and over 2,700 injured. United Nations teams are unable to confirm figures due to the dangerous situation on the ground, but objective assessments, including those based on visits to hospitals, suggest that the numbers are credible.

Israeli sources have confirmed the deaths of five soldiers and another 50 are injured, in addition to four civilians killed and dozens injured by the more than 500 rockets launched in the last 11 days, some of which have struck homes and schools.

As this conflict has escalated, I have repeatedly condemned indiscriminate rocket attacks by Hamas and the excessive use of force by Israel. I have called for an immediate end to the violence, and I have warned that if these appeals went unheeded, civilians were inevitably going to continue to be killed in large numbers. Today, at United Nations facilities in Gaza, that is exactly what has happened. Three United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) schools, set up by the United Nations as places of refuge for civilians fleeing the fighting, have been hit in adjacent Israeli strikes. The third strike, at a school in the Jabaliya refugee camp, has killed dozens of civilians.

These attacks by Israeli military forces, which endanger United Nations facilities serving as places of refuge, are totally unacceptable and should not be repeated. Equally unacceptable are any actions by Hamas militants that endanger the Palestinian civilian population. Today's events underscore the dangers inherent in the continuation and escalation of this conflict. I call once again for an immediate ceasefire.

In the midst of this fighting, the civilian population of Gaza faces a humanitarian crisis. Entire families, including women and children, have perished in the violence, as have United Nations staff and medical workers. There are no shelters for the vast majority of the civilian population. Food and fuel supplies are insufficient. A million people have no electricity. A quarter of a million have no running water. The only answer is an end to the violence. Whatever the rationale of the combatants, only an end to violence and a political way forward can deliver long-term security and peace.

I have been actively engaged with regional and world leaders to bring the violence to a speedy end. I

stressed to President Bush today the importance of acting immediately, and I had valuable consultations with Arab leaders yesterday and today, including President Abbas. My envoys and I have been working to facilitate the emergence of a consensus, and I will continue my efforts with regional and world leaders, including many already gathered here in New York.

I am gratified by the most recent initiative by President Mubarak and President Sarkozy for a way out of the current impasse.

I also intend to travel next week to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory and to regional capitals. But I do not believe we can wait until then to end the violence. We must achieve that now.

To do so, there must be an immediate ceasefire, that is durable and respected fully by all sides. Immediate humanitarian measures, including open crossings for humanitarian assistance, should be ensured.

In addition, viable international mechanisms will be required to ensure that borders are properly functioning. This must include a plan to ensure that the crossings operate as envisaged in the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access and that smuggling from any direction is addressed. Third parties will need to provide assistance, both on the ground and in terms of diplomatic support, to supervise and safeguard all the various elements of a ceasefire.

Gaza's enormous social relief and reconstruction needs will have to be addressed. A consolidated account of the current humanitarian needs, including the urgent appeal by UNRWA, has been issued by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. I urge all Member States to respond promptly and generously to this appeal.

We urgently need to achieve Palestinian unity and the reunification of Gaza with the West Bank within the framework of the legitimate Palestinian Authority. We must also see the urgent continuation of negotiations for a political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which we worked so hard for in 2008 but did not achieve.

This Council has the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. I hope that the Council will act swiftly and decisively to put an end to this crisis.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian National Authority.

President Abbas (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): I have come bearing a message from a wounded people who are being subjected to a new tragedy of destruction, killing, siege, unremitting violence and lack of respect for the most basic human rights.

The massacre today in the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) school at the Jabaliya refugee camp is new proof of the heinous crimes being committed against our people. I come to bear witness to the suffering of the people of Gaza. Children fall before their mothers. Roofs fall on entire families. The cries of the innocents, in their agony, rise. Death and destruction spread throughout every village and every camp.

Gaza today is witnessing a new Palestinian catastrophe. It has been over 60 years since our first catastrophe. The Israeli machine of destruction continues to kill and to commit the most heinous of crimes. It continues to do so despite unprecedented international unanimity in calling for an end to this massacre of innocent civilians, who do not deserve such brutality or such blind aggression.

Before laying out the details of possible solutions to the impasse we face, I call on this Security Council to take the necessary first step to save our people in Gaza. This Council must adopt a resolution calling for an immediate and full cessation of Israeli aggression. The cannons must fall silent so that the voice of dialogue can be heard and a political settlement to this major crisis and this human tragedy can be found. Any delay in ending the fighting and killing will only deepen the tragedy that we have all lived in the past few days. Any delay will make all our people, particularly the young, feel that placing hope in peace and relying on international legitimacy and commitment to international law are all pipe dreams that will never bear fruit and that the present and future offer nothing but more extremism, violence and destructive wars.

The choice before the members of the Security Council is clear-cut. Any message they choose to send

to the peoples of our region — indeed, to all peoples of the world — calling for an end to the aggression will reiterate and underscore the fact that the United Nations will not ignore the tragedy of our people today or allow the Middle East to fall victim to a cycle of bloodshed, extremism, violence and new hatred.

The widows and mothers of Gaza who walk with their children in the streets; the thousands of wounded in hospitals; the corpses under the roofs of mosques, schools and homes; the mothers and fathers who cannot bury their children under the hail of bombs and fire; the Arab and Islamic peoples and, indeed, public opinion around the world will accept nothing less than an urgent intervention by the Security Council to halt the firing and stop the aggressor.

That is my message, which I believe cannot be subject to any compromise, procrastination or delay. There is an urgent need to lay a firm foundation upon which we can build towards a comprehensive political settlement of this destructive and bloody conflict. Let me state that a commitment to respect any agreement we may reach is necessary to avoid the tragedy being repeated. It means providing effective and sufficient protection for all our people and establishing an international force that will help them regain security and peace, contribute to ending the unjust siege that has suffocated Gaza for so long, assist us in opening all border crossings — particularly those between the Gaza Strip and Israel and at Rafah between the Gaza Strip and Egypt — in accordance with international agreements and ensure a comprehensive, reciprocal and permanent ceasefire.

In that regard, I would like to express my appreciation and support for the plan set in motion today by Presidents Mubarak of Egypt and Sarkozy of France.

Our people in the West Bank, in Al-Quds Al-Sharif and in the Gaza Strip have suffered enough under Israeli occupation, the settlements, the separation wall, the hundreds of checkpoints and the detention of over 11,000 of our people in Israeli jails. It is enough. All those present are aware of that and of our belief in international legitimacy. We seek and defend international legitimacy to confront the policy of occupation and its measures, to put an end to Israel's stranglehold on our future and to ensure our right to independence and self-determination.

That is why we seek above all the application of international law and agreements with regard to the borders and crossing points. We do not want anyone to feel threatened. No one's security should be threatened and we want no one to threaten our security. I do not believe that, in the context of the settlement we seek, the Council can condone the ongoing unjust siege and blockade imposed on our people in Gaza, where all elements of a normal life are negated. How can a people — any people — remain deprived of food, medicine, electricity, water and all necessities for development, construction, movement and travel?

A lasting end to the siege is non-negotiable. It is essential if peace is to prevail. Let me stress that when the aggression against our people stops, we shall relentlessly continue to work to overcome our internal Palestinian crisis by restoring national unity, based on the resolutions adopted by the Council of the League of Arab States, which provide for a national unity Government that would oversee simultaneous legislative and presidential elections. The only way to restore unity is through dialogue.

In that regard, we would like to express our sincere appreciation for the efforts being made by President Mohamed Hosni Mubarak of sisterly Egypt to encourage national reconciliation and unity and for the unanimous resolutions of the League of Arab States on the need to pursue efforts in that regard.

I should like to emphasize that we will accept no formula that would impose the status quo through separation and allow steadfast Gaza to remain an entity separate from the body of Palestine. The Gaza Strip has undergone all the stages of our national struggle and has fought hard to maintain our Palestinian national unity. It was the birthplace of our national liberation movement and has held high the flame of independence and freedom. How can we accept a fate for Gaza other than that of being an integral and proud part of a united Palestinian nation — one independent Palestinian State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital?

I should like, Sir, to thank you, your friendly country and the entire international community for their sincere messages of peace, calling for an immediate end to the aggression. I would like to pay tribute to the important role played by the agencies of the United Nations, particularly UNRWA, to save our people and to ensure that they receive the basic essentials of life. I appeal to all to provide the

necessary assistance to those agencies, to all civil and international organizations that are saving the lives of our wounded people and to those seeking to convey an accurate picture of the new catastrophe to the world. I should like to thank all Arab and friendly countries that were quick to provide humanitarian and medical assistance. Let me express the hope that such support will grow to contain the huge consequences of the tragedy we are facing. I should like to express my appreciation for the efforts being made by Egypt and Jordan to ensure that this assistance reaches its targets.

The experiences of the past few decades have proved that military aggression, however massive, cannot be a viable and lasting solution to conflict. The continued suffering of our people through killing and destruction will not bring our people to its knees. That people, like any other, will accept nothing less than freedom and justice. We shall remain committed to the path of just peace, committed to continuing the political process and true to the commitments we have undertaken, based on the balanced solution set out in the Arab Peace Initiative and under international law and resolutions of international legitimacy.

We know that some Powers wish to abort the two-State solution. They wish to bury the chances for peace under the rubble of the war against steadfast Gaza. We put our trust in this Council's role and in its determination to prevent such nefarious circles from harming the interests of our peoples.

The resolution to be adopted by the Security Council on the cessation of aggression and war against Gaza must reiterate the need for the political process to continue under genuine and effective international supervision in order to ensure that an independent Palestinian State will be created within the 1967 borders and with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital; that a just and agreed solution will be found to the issue of Palestinian refugees in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948; and that all detainees and prisoners will be released.

Like all the rest of the Palestinian people everywhere, the people of Gaza are a people of peace. They have fought for peace in the past and will continue to fight for peace in the future. Let us give them the peace that they deserve today and put an end to the genocide and destruction. Let us not allow the killing of one more Palestinian child. Let us not allow one more Palestinian mother to cry for her children. We must not allow it. We must put an end to the massacre of my people. Let my people live and let my people be free.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Ms. Shalev (Israel): I thank the Secretary-General for honouring this meeting with his presence.

Eight years: For eight years the citizens of southern Israel have suffered the trauma of almost daily missile attacks from Gaza. For eight years more than 8,000 rockets and mortar shells have targeted Israeli towns and villages. For eight years the residents of these towns have had a bare 15 seconds to hurry, with their children and their elderly, to find cover before rockets and missiles land on their houses and schools. Fifteen seconds would not give the members of this Council time to leave this room. No State would permit such attacks on its citizens; nor should it. But Israel sought every way to avoid the current conflict.

In 2005 Israel removed from Gaza every one of its soldiers and every one of its 8,000 civilians, along with their homes and schools, their synagogues and cemeteries. We did this to try to create an opening for peace, and for Palestinians to build a prosperous society.

But the Hamas regime that brutally seized control of Gaza, murdering scores of fellow Palestinians, has no interest in peace and prosperity. It is vehemently opposed to negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians. It rejects the Annapolis process which was commended by this Council last month in resolution 1850 (2008). Hamas has no interest in making peace with the enemy. For Hamas, peace is the enemy. Its only interest is in establishing a regime of tyranny for Gazans and of terror for Israelis.

Hamas likes to tell the Palestinians that it was terrorism that brought Israel to withdraw from Gaza in 2005. But the truth is plain to see: it was the hope for peace that led us to withdraw from Gaza, and the terrorism of Hamas that compelled us to re-enter. In our efforts to avoid confrontation, we also agreed six months ago to an Egyptian-brokered *tahadiya* — a situation of calm. Hamas violated this arrangement on a daily basis. Over 365 rockets and mortar shells were fired during this period. And all the while it used the so-called calm to build up its supplies of weapons and

rockets, smuggled through tunnels into the Gaza Strip. Yet still we restrained ourselves.

But then, Hamas unilaterally announced the end of the *tahadiya* and began to wage a new campaign of rocket attacks against Israel's citizens with the weapons it had smuggled into Gaza during the calm. Then, we could not restrain ourselves any longer. With its new Iranian-made missiles, Hamas is now able to reach as far as the cities of Ashdod and Beer Sheva, placing over one million Israelis in the shadow of its terror.

Many in this Chamber have condemned Hamas's terrorist attacks, and we welcome this statement of basic principle. But the families at home in the city of Sderot and the children at school in Kibbutz Netiv Ha'asara will not be protected by these condemnations.

In the face of such terrorism we have no choice. We have to defend ourselves, not from the Palestinian people, but from the terrorists who have taken them hostage; not to gain territory or power, but to demonstrate that our restraint was not weakness and to give our citizens the basic right of a normal life.

In this campaign, Israel has dealt the Hamas infrastructure a major blow. Dozens of its terrorist factories and training bases have been destroyed, its stockpiles of rockets have been significantly depleted and many of the tunnels used to smuggle weapons have been put out of action. But we have not only sought to change reality for our citizens; we have also sought to uphold the values that set us apart from the terrorists.

Hamas rejects every core humanitarian principle. Instead of waging its battle openly between combatants, it directs its attacks against civilians. Some have called these attacks "indiscriminate", but that is not the case. Hamas attacks are very discriminate, directed deliberately at innocent men, women and children. In the past week alone, Hamas rockets have landed on a school and on a kindergarten.

Hamas shows a similar disdain for the lives of Palestinians. It has adopted the terrorist tactic — the coward's tactic — of using civilians as shields while its leaders themselves flee from combat with Israel's soldiers and make pathetic demonstrations of bravado from their bunkers. It hides its missiles and terrorist bases in homes, hospitals and mosques, and, as we saw earlier today, deliberately launches attacks from in and around schools and United Nations facilities, with tragic results.

For Israel, every civilian death — Israeli or Palestinian — is a tragedy. In responding to terrorist attacks that show no respect for human life, either Israeli or Palestinian, Israel takes steps to protect both. It takes every possible measure to limit civilian casualties, even where those measures endanger the lives of our soldiers or the effectiveness of their operations. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) have dropped tens of thousands of leaflets and made thousands of phone calls to Palestinian civilians, beseeching them to leave the areas of terrorist operation to avoid harm. But let this be clear: failing to respond to terrorists simply because they are using civilians as cover is not and cannot be an option. To do so would simply broadcast an invitation to every terrorist group in the world to set up shop inside a hospital or a kindergarten.

Unlike the Hamas regime, which has targeted crossing points to prevent the entry of aid and has prevented Palestinians from boarding ambulances, Israel respects its humanitarian responsibilities. It has permitted Palestinians in need of medical aid to enter Israel for treatment and has set up a special humanitarian situation room to coordinate with the aid organizations working in Gaza. Since the start of the fighting, Israel has facilitated the entry into Gaza of more than 540 trucks, delivering more than 10,000 tons of humanitarian assistance. In fact, just a few days ago, Israel was asked by the World Food Programme to halt supplies of food shipments since the warehouses were full.

It is time for the international community to place responsibility for the humanitarian situation in Gaza where it lies: on the shoulders of the terrorists who have chosen violence over peace. It lies on the shoulders of those Hamas leaders who, from their bunkers and luxury hotels in Damascus, have abandoned the people of Gaza and have chosen to endanger and exploit them rather than protect them.

This conflict is a fundamental clash between two world views, between moderates and extremists, between those who seek to preserve life and humanity and those who glorify death and destruction. As Hamas spokesman Fathi Hamad was proud to announce on Al-Aqsa Television,

> "Palestinians have created a human shield of women, children the elderly and the jihad fighters, as if to say to the Zionist enemy, 'We desire death as you desire life'".

For that reason, there is — and can be — no equivalence between Israel and the Hamas terrorists we are confronting. There is no equivalence between a State that equips civilian homes with bomb shelters and a terrorist regime that fills them with missiles. There is no equivalence between military commanders who struggle daily to ensure that their operations are conducted in accordance with the requirements of international humanitarian law and the terrorists who flout that law by keeping Corporal Gilad Shalit captive, without even allowing the International Committee of the Red Cross access to see him — for 930 days. There is no equivalence between a State using force in exercise of its right to self-defence and a terrorist organization for which the very resort to violence is unlawful.

No doubt, there will be much discussion today about the credibility of the Council and the need for a resolution. But the credibility of this Council is measured not by the pieces of paper it issues, but by the values it upholds. Is the Council's credibility strengthened when it calls for a ceasefire that effectively equates a terrorist group with a State defending itself against it? Does anyone here truly believe that Hamas will heed the words of this Council?

This is not about a "ceasefire" with terrorism or a mutual cessation of hostilities. It is about ensuring the end of terrorism from Gaza and the end of smuggling weapons into Gaza, so that there is no longer a need for Israeli defensive operations.

This conflict will end not when terrorism is appeased or accommodated, but when the international community stands determined and united against it. Anything less than that will only embolden Hamas, lengthening this round of the conflict and accelerating the next. Anything less will reward Iran, the coward's coward, which hides behind terrorists as they hide behind civilians, and encourage its worldwide efforts to use Hamas and other terrorist groups to fight its wars on the cheap. And anything less will be a major setback for hopes for peace and prosperity for the Palestinians. As long as Hamas rules Gaza, rejecting the Quartet principles and seeking Israel's destruction, Gaza can never be part of a Palestinian State.

There are many in this Council who speak in favour of peace. But it is not enough to support peace; we have to confront those who work to destroy it. For that reason, the current military operation is not an obstacle to peace; it is a prerequisite for peace.

We, the people of Israel, listened to the international community when you told us to withdraw from Gaza and promised that that would give us the credibility to respond forcefully should Gaza turn into a launching pad for terrorism. We listened when you promised us that acting with restraint during the period of calm would give us the credibility to fight back should the rocket attacks resume. Now is the time for you to make good on those promises. In the clash between life and death, between building societies and destroying them, Hamas has taken its side. Now there is no choice but for the international community to take a side itself.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now invite His Excellency The Right Honourable David Miliband, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, to take the floor.

Mr. Miliband (United Kingdom): There could not be a greater contrast between the daily regime of delicate diplomacy at the United Nations and the day-to-day reality of death and destruction in Gaza, but the two are linked. The United Kingdom believes that the crisis — and I use that word advisedly — in Gaza is an indictment of the collective failure of all of us, over a long period, to bring about the two-State solution, which offers the only hope for security and justice for Israelis and Palestinians alike.

The two speeches that we have just heard, from President Abbas and Ambassador Shalev, define the challenge for this Council. Both were moving, deeply felt and passionate. I believe that, in this debate, we cannot simply restate our national positions; we have a wider responsibility to support all efforts to achieve an immediate ceasefire and to chart a course back to the common vision set out just three weeks ago in Security Council resolution 1850 (2008).

As we meet, lives are at stake and new initiatives are under way, notably from President Mubarak and President Sarkozy, to engineer new action for a

ceasefire that engages Israel and responds to its security concerns. The United Kingdom supports those initiatives. We in the Council now need to use our discussions over the next 24 hours to be clear in our principles and practical in our conclusions to reinforce those efforts.

The truce of June to December 2008 was, in truth, less than that. Rockets were fired into Israel, Palestinians died in Israeli military action and the people of Gaza suffered greater and greater deprivation. However, the immediate trigger for Israeli military action was the end of the truce. Hamas rejected its extension and fired almost 300 rockets between 19 December and 27 December 2008. Those rockets are not just a danger and a provocation — though they are that. They demonstrate a choice by Hamas, not just to target the people of Israel, but also to target the fragile negotiations for peace, sponsored over the past year by the United States.

However, the immediate consequence of Israeli military action over the past 10 days is also clear: 600 dead, many of them civilians and children — the horror of war piled upon months of deprivation. The confirmation just a few hours ago that 30 civilians were killed today in a United Nations school in Gaza is a devastating reminder of the urgency of our responsibilities.

Earlier today, the Quartet envoy called the situation in Gaza "hell". The shortages of food, fuel and medicine are, according to our reports, acute. The scale of the suffering is immense. The need for humanitarian supplies is urgent. In this context, it is right to salute the leadership not just of the Secretary-General, but also of the brave United Nations workers trying to relieve suffering in Gaza.

The United Kingdom stands four square behind the Security Council statement of 28 December calling for an immediate halt to all violence. I reiterate today the call of my Prime Minister for an immediate ceasefire. But we are enjoined to come to the United Nations not just to make declarations, but to seek common ground and to find common purpose, so we must focus on the substance and permanence of a ceasefire, as well as on its timing.

Israel is right to say that the flow of illegal arms into Gaza is a threat to its citizens and needs to be curbed. We say that we need to support countries in the region in developing the tools to tackle the trafficking of weapons from land and sea. This will be a complex and difficult task, but it is essential.

Meanwhile, the Palestinian Authority is right to say that it concluded an agreement in 2005 on the opening of crossings for people, goods and aid into Gaza. We say that we need to open those crossings and re-establish the authority of the Palestinian Authority over them. This will help the people of Gaza. It will also undercut the smuggling trade.

The permanence of a ceasefire depends on something else. President Abbas is a powerful and consistent advocate for the interests of all Palestinians, whether they live in Gaza or the West Bank. The unity of Palestine is essential to any decent vision of the future. It is also a precondition for a democratic politics of consent in which there is one legitimate authority and in which every Palestinian has a voice in the only process that counts: the peace process.

The test for us over the next 24 hours is simple: will we help to bring an end to the current conflict and pave the way back to the vision the Council set out three weeks ago? Our starting point must be the goals of an immediate ceasefire, an end to arms trafficking and an opening of the crossings. But we also have a responsibility to keep alive the vision of a peaceful Middle East in which Palestinians have the dignity of statehood and Israelis have recognition and security from their neighbours. That is the responsibility of the Council, that is our task today and those are responsibilities and tasks that the United Kingdom wants to help resolve.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ali Babacan, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Turkey.

Mr. Babacan (Turkey): This is the first official Security Council meeting that Turkey is attending as a non-permanent member. I would like to pay tribute to the French presidency.

Let me also welcome President Mahmoud Abbas and the Ministers of the Arab League delegation, who are here to brief us about the current situation in Gaza.

We are confronted with a tragic situation. Today is the eleventh day of the attacks against Gaza and the fourth day after the launch of the ground assault. As Israeli forces continue to operate in Gaza, the crisis further deepens in scope and impact and civilians

continue to take the brunt of the misery. Every step in escalation takes us further away from peace.

The situation in Gaza is indeed very grave. In this regard, we deeply regret the loss of civilian life. It is highly regrettable that civilians have become victims. Just today for instance, a United Nations-run school in a Palestinian refugee camp in Gaza was hit by Israeli missiles, killing more than 40 people who were using the school as a shelter. The people of Gaza are also faced with a severe shortage of all basic needs, including food and medical supplies. Infrastructure is almost entirely damaged. Thousands of people have lost their homes. In short, what we face in Gaza is a human tragedy. Israel's military operations against Gaza constitute a disproportionate and excessive use of force and must therefore be immediately stopped.

Such punitive measures, which harm the well-being of the entire population, can serve nothing but fomenting further resentment. Let us not forget that the Palestinians, who are being bombed and attacked today, will be Israel's neighbours forever. In the same way, it is impossible to understand the closure of the crossings to humanitarian assistance for weeks and months, leaving the Gaza people in total isolation and deprivation.

Given all these facts, we cannot allow the situation to continue any longer. The international community and the Security Council cannot stand idly by while innocent civilians lose their lives. We must try to put an immediate end to the ongoing tragedy in the region. Otherwise, the responsibility of inaction and indifference will be impossible to bear.

Moreover, the tragedy in Gaza could have very negative implications on the whole region. Efforts towards stability and a durable peace have already taken a serious blow. Bearing in mind all of this, and bearing in mind the dire consequences that we may face, we urge all the sides to act with restraint and in a responsible manner. No one has anything to gain from this dangerous scenario.

It is within this approach that Turkey continues its active diplomatic efforts, trying to contribute to a course of action which will help bring peace, security and stability to the region. To that end, our Prime Minister has visited Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Saudi Arabia to meet with his counterparts, including President Mahmoud Abbas. We also hosted the extraordinary ministerial meeting of the Executive Committee of the Organization of the Islamic Conference last Saturday. Based on those visits and our extensive contact with all other interested parties, we believe that at this stage the priority must be to ensure an immediate halt to Israel's military operations and a full cessation of hostilities, to agree on a sustainable ceasefire and to open the border crossings to Gaza so as to end the blockades.

In parallel, we should also do all that we can to address the pressing humanitarian and economic needs of the people in Gaza. This is an equally urgent need, as the people in Gaza are faced with grave shortages of food, fuel and medical supplies. Turkey, for its part, has already stepped up its efforts in that direction, but more should be done. Israel must be cooperative in allowing unhindered access for humanitarian assistance and in reopening all border crossings.

In addition to those two most urgent steps, the achievement of unity among the Palestinians is also of paramount importance in this course of action. Without such unity, it will be very difficult for the Palestinians to achieve their goal of an independent, peaceful and prosperous future.

Finally, Israelis and Palestinians should be brought back to the negotiation table and encouraged to work toward a comprehensive and lasting peace on the basis of the principles set out by the Quartet and the Annapolis Joint Understanding and the Arab Peace Initiative. After all, only through a meaningful and effective dialogue can we achieve our ultimate objective of comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

These, we believe, are the elements of a course of action that needs to be urgently put into effect for the cessation of hostilities and return to normalcy. Within this framework we can, and maybe should, also consider deploying an international monitoring mission to the region. In light of the publicly expressed views of the parties to the conflict, it is our understanding that the acceptability and viability of a ceasefire, as well as a sustainable end to the blockade, depend on an international commitment to guarantee it.

The international community must act, and must do so quickly and with clear ends in mind. The risks of inaction are enormous and are getting bigger every day. Turkey, for its part, will continue its endeavours to help restore calm in the region so as to open the way for full-fledged efforts for a lasting and comprehensive peace. We believe that the Security Council should also

play its due role in this regard and live up to its responsibilities under the United Nations Charter by helping to bring this crisis to an end.

The President (*spoke in French*): I next invite the Secretary of State of the United States of America, Her Excellency Ms. Condoleezza Rice, to take the floor.

Ms. Rice (United States of America): I wish to thank President Abbas for his presence here, and also the Ministers from the Arab League States who have joined us.

The United States is, of course, deeply concerned about the situation in Gaza, which is clearly worsening. We have been working around the clock to try to end the violence there. The ongoing attacks against Israel and the decision by Hamas not to respect the previous period of calm show us that when this ends there must be new arrangements in place, not a return to the status quo ante. It is imperative that any ceasefire be durable and sustainable and that it ensure the safety and security of Israelis and Palestinians alike.

The situation before the current events in Gaza was clearly not sustainable. Hundreds of thousands of Israelis lived under the daily threat of rocket attacks. Frankly, no country — none of our countries — would have been willing to tolerate such a circumstance. Moreover, the people of Gaza watched as insecurity and lawlessness increased and as their living conditions grew more dire because of the actions of Hamas, which began with the illegal coup against the Palestinian Authority in Gaza. A ceasefire that returns to those circumstances is unacceptable, and it will not last.

We need urgently to conclude a ceasefire that can endure and bring real security. That will begin a period of true calm that includes an end to rocket, mortar and other attacks on Israelis and allows for the cessation of Israel's military offensive. It must also include an end to the smuggling into Gaza and a reopening of crossings so that Palestinians can benefit from humanitarian goods and basic supplies. The November 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access provides a basis for reopening those crossings. We must find a way, with the consent and full cooperation of like-minded Governments, to prevent any arms or explosives from entering Gaza, and the reopening of the tunnel systems that have allowed rearmament of Hamas must be prevented.

Our goal must be the stabilization and normalization of life in Gaza. That will require a principled resolution of the political challenges in Gaza that ultimately re-establishes the Palestinian Authority's legitimate control and facilitates the normal operation of all crossings. The November 26 Arab League statement will serve as an important guide in these efforts, efforts that are led by Egypt.

The international community should adopt an intensive reconstruction initiative, perhaps through a donors conference, that would complement the efforts of the Palestinian Authority in Gaza, because the Palestinian Authority actually devotes 58 per cent of its budget to Gaza. There should be an effort to reconstruct Gaza.

As we strive for a ceasefire, the United States remains deeply concerned about innocent Palestinians and Israelis who are suffering. Let me assure the Council that we understand the urgency of an end to the fighting and that we are working around the clock to bring it into being. In that regard, we are pleased by and wish to commend the statement of the President of Egypt, and we wish to follow up on that initiative.

But we also are very concerned about the humanitarian situation in Gaza. From American partners on the ground I have had detailed reports about the difficult circumstances in Gaza. I have discussed them in detail with Prime Minister Olmert and Foreign Minister Livni. The Prime Minister has informed me that as of tomorrow Israel will open a humanitarian corridor so that there can be some relief for the people of Gaza. That is something we will follow up on, but we will also help you, Mr. Secretary-General, to follow up on that through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), because the problem, as I understand it, is that even if goods get into Gaza it is not possible to distribute them there. The United States will work actively to relieve that circumstance. Moreover, the United States — which has already provided $85 million for humanitarian work in Gaza in the last year — will contribute more emergency aid, if that is needed.

We very much need to find a solution to this problem in the short term. But this time it really must be a solution that does not allow Hamas to use Gaza as a launching pad against Israeli cities. It has to be a solution that does not allow the rearmament of Hamas,

and it must find the way to open crossings so that Palestinians in Gaza can have a normal life.

Just three weeks ago we sat in this Chamber to vote on resolution 1850 (2008). It described the principles to chart a better future for Israelis and Palestinians alike. Resolution 1850 (2008) noted that lasting peace can only be based on an enduring commitment to mutual recognition, freedom from violence, incitement and terror, and the two-State solution, building on previous agreements and obligations.

I think the members of this Council know that President Bush and I personally have been very dedicated to that goal. We remain dedicated to that goal, and the United States of America will remain dedicated to that goal, because we know that the time has long since come when Palestinians, who deserve to live in their own State, should get that State, and when Israelis, who will live in peace and security when they have a peaceful neighbour, should have that peace and security.

I do not mean in any way to diminish the dangers, the urgency, the challenges of this moment in Gaza. This is a crisis that we must resolve, and resolve urgently. But we must also stay focused on creating the conditions that will ultimately lead to a real peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor now to the Secretary of the General People's Committee for Foreign Liaison and International Cooperation of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, His Excellency Mr. Abdurrahman Mohamed Shalgham.

Mr. Shalgham (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): On 27 December 2008, the Israelis launched their destructive aggression, making use a wide variety of the most lethal weapons against defenceless people, having previously besieged and starved them and having deprived them even of water, medicine and other necessities — acts which met with astonishing silence from the Security Council. The Israelis claim to have carried out these actions in response to the firing of rockets from the Gaza Strip, which, according to them, was a violation of the truce agreed upon in June 2008.

Here, we must stop for a moment and consider the facts. Members know that the Gaza Strip has been under siege since the middle of 2007. Under Egyptian auspices, the Israelis and the Palestinians reached a Gaza truce in June 2008. Both parties undertook to cease all forms of violence, and, for its part, the Israeli side committed itself to lifting the blockade, opening the border crossings and returning to the situation that had existed prior to June 2007. This agreed lull was intended to put an end to aggression and fighting for a period during which the two parties concerned would observe the ceasefire as a stage on the way towards a just and final settlement of the Palestinian issue.

But from the very first days of the ceasefire, the Israelis, through their Prime Minister, have adopted a highly negative position. They have preferred to employ force, escalation and aggression at the expense of lasting peace. Israel has essentially not been a party to the ceasefire, which it unjustifiably violated more than 195 times, martyring 25 individuals.

Israel has not lifted the siege or reopened the crossings. On 4 November 2008 the Israeli army carried out an incursion into the eastern Gaza Strip with no provocation from the Palestinian side; during that incursion six Palestinians were killed. That was a serious violation of the truce. It is only normal that there should be a response. The ceasefire must not be respected by the Palestinians only.

Yet in spite of this, in all that time the Palestinians did not fire a single shot, even though they were entitled to do so because they are under occupation and are entitled to respond to Israeli aggression.

Since 5 November 2008, in full view of the entire world, the Israelis have imposed a complete air, land and sea blockade on Gaza. The United Nations considers that to be a clear violation of international law. The blockade even prevents humanitarian assistance from reaching Gaza: trucks and assistance provided by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) are unable to enter the Gaza Strip. This means that the Agency has had to suspend its distribution of basic goods to those in need. As everybody knows, that means half of the population of Gaza. The result is that they have starved those people.

On 18 December 2008 (see S/PV.6049), my country described the various repercussions of the blockade and the total paralysis of economic activity. Bakeries have closed; 80 per cent of households are living below the poverty line; there are grave water and

sanitation problems — the people of Gaza have water only once a week. Water treatment plants are no longer in operation, which means that stagnant water now lies in the streets of Gaza. There is virtually a complete lack of medicine. The Council has heard from numerous United Nations agencies that 150 essential medicines are not to be found. Many people have died for lack of medicine and because they are being prevented from seeking treatment outside Gaza.

The electric power plant that provided more than half of Gaza's electricity is basically shut down. Banks are no longer operating and are on the verge of collapse. The World Bank has drawn attention to this issue, because the Israelis have prevented Bank funds from entering the Gaza Strip.

The multifaceted fallout from the blockade is well known.

All of this has been done in the full view of the Security Council and in spite of numerous appeals and warnings from officials of United Nations agencies. The Council has failed to take action.

The underlying causes and principal reasons for this situation are the occupation, the denial to Palestinians of their rights and the immoral and illegal practices of the Israelis.

The Israeli authorities are occupation authorities; they have clear obligations under international law, in particular under the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention include provision of security, food and medical services and the facilitation of emergency services. But the Israeli authorities have nonetheless violated all of their obligations and have imposed collective punishment. They have perpetrated extremely grave crimes, as everyone knows. All of this has taken place after the international community's unanimous declaration on genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

In spite of that, the Council has failed to take action. The fact that the Council has taken no action has encouraged the Israeli authorities in their actions since 27 December 2008. Air raids, employing cutting-edge weaponry, have been stepped up. There we see the origins of the crimes of genocide and crimes against humanity.

Through their Minister of Defence and other officials, the Israeli authorities continue to state that these crimes are only the beginning, and that Israel will continue and expand its aggression. Israel will continue the blockade, which is starving Palestinians. Israel has rejected humanitarian appeals for a 24-hour lull to make it possible to deliver humanitarian assistance.

Now there has been a very serious escalation: the ground attack that began on Saturday, 3 January 2009. The result, we fear, has been a major surge in deaths and injuries. There has been destruction, even of UNRWA schools — even though Karen AbuZayd, Commissioner-General of UNRWA, has said that the Palestinian resistance is not using the Agency's infrastructure, facilities or schools as human shields.

In spite of the Security Council's urgent consultations on 3 January 2009, no common position has been adopted, not even a statement to the press.

The Israelis have once again demonstrated that they are not interested in peace. What they are interested in is new territory. They are perpetrating terrorism against the Palestinians and are using every means available to them. They are starving, arresting and killing Palestinians on a mass scale. The aim of what the Israelis are methodically doing is clear. The means they use are also clear, What the Israelis continue to do is to perpetrate the greatest violence in the history of the Israeli occupation. That is Israel's response to resolution 1850 (2008) of 16 December 2008.

The vacillation of the Council and its hesitation on taking a decision and adopting a resolution have permitted the Israeli war machine to continue to perpetrate the worst of horrors against a defenceless people and to ignore international law. The Council is now repeating what it did in 2006, when it gave Israel the leeway to keep killing Lebanese civilians and to destroy Lebanon's basic infrastructure in order to achieve the aims of certain parties.

The fact is that the massacre perpetrated by Israel in Gaza continues and has claimed the lives of some 600 Palestinians, more than a fourth of them babies, women and children and 80 per cent of them civilians. In addition, 2,800 have been wounded, 20 per cent of whom are in critical condition; mosques, homes, schools and official buildings have been destroyed. The deterioration in the humanitarian situation that we are seeing today is astonishing. A school was targeted

today and dozens were killed; the school was not a bunker. The Council should ensure that the criminals responsible do not escape punishment.

My delegation has submitted a draft resolution to the Council. We have made several changes to take the concerns of various members into account. We hope that the Council will adopt the draft resolution. Every minute that passes means more suffering, destruction, killing, hatred and desire for vengeance. Any delay would send the wrong message to the aggressor, who would continue with its aggression and crimes.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Michael Spindelegger, Federal Minister for European and International Affairs of Austria.

Mr. Spindelegger (Austria): As this is the first time that Austria is taking part in a formal meeting of the Council as one of the new non-permanent members, let me begin by saying that it is an honour for my country to serve the interests of peace and international security in this capacity. During the two years to come, Austria will strive to exercise this important responsibility in the interest of the entire membership of the United Nations.

I should like to thank Foreign Minister Kouchner for taking this very timely initiative. You, Sir, can count on Austria's full support and active cooperation in all your efforts to end the bloodshed in Gaza and southern Israel.

We greatly appreciate the presence of the Secretary-General. Austria has taken good note of his appeal to the Security Council and of his intention to travel to the region soon. He has our full support.

The importance of today's meeting is also highlighted by the presence of so many foreign ministers around the table and in the Chamber. More specifically, I wish to acknowledge the presence of President Mahmoud Abbas, who has just had to leave. I listened very carefully to his statement, as well as to that of the Ambassador of Israel.

For many years, Austria has maintained close and friendly relations with all the countries of the Middle East. We are therefore extremely concerned about the serious further deterioration of the situation in and around Gaza.

Austria deeply regrets that calls by the Security Council, the Middle East Quartet, the European Union and others for an end to the violence have gone unheeded. We also regret that the Security Council was unable to formally agree on a call for an immediate, permanent and fully respected ceasefire during its emergency meeting on Saturday.

In the meantime, the European Union and France, as well as other members of the Council, have reinforced their efforts to help resolve the crisis. Nonetheless, hostilities have so far continued unabated, with an ever-increasing number of civilian victims.

Austria has repeatedly condemned the rocket attacks by Hamas from Gaza on Israel. We respect the right of Israel to safeguard the security of its citizens, but we also believe that the military operations under way are clearly disproportionate and continue to inflict an unacceptable toll on Palestinian civilians. We therefore call on both sides to adhere to an immediate and permanent ceasefire, which needs to be effectively monitored. There must be an unconditional halt to rocket attacks by Hamas on Israel and an end to Israeli military action.

Austria remains greatly concerned about the ever more desperate humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip and its effects on the civilian population. We therefore call on all parties to take all necessary measures to alleviate the serious humanitarian situation on the ground and to ensure the continuous provision of humanitarian supplies to Gaza, including through a lasting and normal opening of all border crossings. An effective end to the smuggling of arms and ammunition into the Gaza Strip is an indispensable prerequisite in that regard. Moreover, we also call upon all parties to strictly observe the rules of humanitarian and human rights law.

If violence is not brought to an end, a resumption of the diplomatic process towards a political solution will become more and more difficult. The hostilities have gravely disrupted the various channels of communication that had been successfully established during recent months. Continuing violence will have a lasting negative effect, not only on the follow-up to Annapolis but also on other developments towards comprehensive regional peace, in particular along the Israeli-Syrian track. Against that backdrop, Austria welcomes the most recent diplomatic initiative in the region, in particular the important statement made

today by President Mubarak and the contacts undertaken by President Sarkozy.

The Security Council must remain actively engaged in encouraging and supporting all efforts to end the conflict and to bring about what peoples in the region have been yearning for during decades — the creation of a viable, independent, democratic and sovereign Palestinian State living in peace and security with Israel within recognized international borders.

We continue to believe that the objective of the Security Council must be the rapid resolution of the current crisis based on the following elements: a call for an immediate, permanent and fully respected ceasefire; free access for humanitarian supplies into Gaza, including through the lasting and normal opening of all border crossings; an effective end to the smuggling of arms and ammunition into the Gaza Strip; a call on all parties to fully respect their obligations under humanitarian and human rights law; full support for the regional and diplomatic efforts under way to solve the crisis; and a call on Israelis and Palestinians to continue negotiations for a comprehensive solution as envisaged in resolution 1850 (2008).

I am convinced that that is an outcome that would be in the interest of all parties. Austria will do everything to help you, Mr. President, to move this matter forward along those lines as rapidly as possible.

Mr. Le Luong Minh (Viet Nam): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important and timely meeting of the Security Council and for personally presiding over it. I also wish to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his statement, as well as President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian National Authority and the foreign ministers of Arab countries for their participation. I also thank Ambassador Shalev of Israel for her participation.

My delegation has followed with profound concern the sharply escalating situation in the Gaza Strip over the past few days, which has been taking a lamentable toll in innocent lives and causing widespread destruction to infrastructure and the private property of innocent Palestinians since Israel launched its military operations into Gaza.

We are gravely concerned about the worsening humanitarian crisis faced by Palestinians in Gaza as a result of the ongoing military actions, the continued closure of border crossings, the obstruction of access to humanitarian aid, including food and medicine, and the reduction in fuel and electricity supplies.

Every passing day is another day we see the lives of more innocent Palestinian civilians, many of them women and children, lost or harmed and those of innocent Israelis threatened. We are strongly convinced that all indiscriminate attacks against civilians are unjustifiable under any pretext and that there cannot be a military solution to the current conflict.

My delegation calls upon the parties concerned to exercise the maximum restraint, cease all military activities and acts of violence and return to the negotiating table to resolve outstanding issues by peaceful means. We urge Israel to stop the excessive and disproportionate use of force and its military operations and immediately withdraw its forces from Gaza.

While recalling both parties' mutual obligations to comply with international humanitarian and human rights laws, including the provisions of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, we underline the urgent need to cease all restrictive measures and open border crossings in order to facilitate the delivery of food, medical aid, fuel and other humanitarian supplies to the suffering people in Gaza, the evacuation of the injured and the unhindered access of humanitarian workers.

We pay tribute to the United Nations agencies, in particular the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and other humanitarian organizations for their work under challenging circumstances on the ground.

We call upon the international community to extend further emergency and humanitarian assistance to the civilian population in Gaza.

At this critical juncture, when every opportunity to make peace and bring an immediate end to the current crisis should be treasured, my delegation fully supports the intensified and coordinated efforts of the international community to establish an immediate, permanent, effective and monitored ceasefire between the parties concerned and thus ensure long-term peace, security and stability in the region.

The Security Council, which is mandated to maintain international peace and security, can and

should play its due role in finding a durable solution to this crisis by adopting a resolution that will stop the continued loss of civilian lives, prevent the recurrence or further escalation on the situation and put the peace process back on track. Along these lines, my delegation is prepared to work constructively with other Council members on the draft resolution proposed by Libya on behalf of the League of Arab States with a view to achieving consensus and its early adoption.

Finally, my delegation would like to reaffirm Viet Nam's steadfast support for the peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the realization of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace, within secure and recognized borders, on the basis of the road map, the Arab Peace Initiative, the Annapolis understanding and relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1850 (2008).

Mr. Kafando (*spoke in French*): We thank you, Mr. President, for having convened this meeting of the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, in particular the serious crisis currently taking place in Gaza. We have greatly appreciated the presence here of the President of the Palestinian Authority in this debate. We also welcome the presence of the Secretary-General and of all the ministers and representatives here today.

The unprecedented mobilization of the international community that we are witnessing unquestionably demonstrates the clear awareness that we all have of the seriousness of the situation and of the urgent need to find an appropriate and timely response to it. We are deeply concerned by the ongoing hostilities between Israel and Hamas, which have worsened since Israel launched military ground operations in Gaza on 3 January.

Whatever can be said in terms of the responsibilities of the various parties, we must acknowledge that recourse to force, whoever undertakes it and in whatever way it is used, cannot be the appropriate solution to any conflict, much less the current crisis. Quite the contrary, it has no other effect than to further worsen tensions. We are particularly distressed by the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Gaza, which was already of great concern. As hostages to the situation, the civilian population is paying a very heavy toll for those confrontations.

This is why my delegation calls for an immediate ceasefire, with a reliable monitoring mechanism, the opening of crossings to allow for humanitarian access, the rejection of the military option and the re-launching of a political process that is credible and carried out in good faith.

The urgency of the situation requires effective and rapid action by the Security Council. Everyone has acknowledged this. The Council owes as much to the Palestinian people, in particular the people in Gaza, who are under embargo and whose untold suffering challenges our conscience as human beings. It owes it to the Israeli people who have been victims of Hamas rocket attacks. It owes it to stability in the region and to international peace and security.

We would like to commend the many and varied initiatives under way to bring about a settlement to the crisis. No effort or expression of goodwill is or will be superfluous in terms of contributing to putting an end to the tragedy unfolding before us.

The results that we hope to achieve in the short term must be followed up and sustained by a firm commitment by all parties to undertake a search for the ways and means to bring about a lasting solution. To that end, we need to take into account the important gains already achieved on the path to peace, in particular the Arab Peace Initiative, the Quartet road map and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

But it is, above all, up to the parties themselves to demonstrate greater political will, which requires that they fully comply with their commitments. The parties need to establish the minimum conditions for trust that will be necessary for building a solid and lasting basis for peace. In particular, we urge Israel to put an end to the settlements and the blockade of Gaza. At the same time, we call upon Hamas to end the rocket and mortar attacks against Israeli territories.

Clearly, the settlement of the crisis in the Middle East, including the current crisis, is a collective and shared responsibility. The direct actors in the international community need to play their respective parts. We reiterate our full support for all negotiating efforts under way currently, particularly the most recent efforts undertaken by President Mubarak and President Sarkozy to bring about a rapid ceasefire and the restoration of calm.

For its part, the Security Council needs to take action, and take it quickly, not only to help to put an end to the human and humanitarian tragedy under way, but also to avoid others in the future. We are prepared, along with all the other members of the Council, to provide our modest contribution to this.

Mr. Ballestero (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation is pleased to see you here in New York, Mr. President, to preside over this meeting. We also welcome the presence of President Abbas, the Secretary-General, Secretary of State Rice, the various ministers and deputy ministers for foreign affairs and the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States.

My country has been a member of the Security Council for the past 12 months. Throughout that period, we have tried to give meaning to our presence here by promoting the observance of international law in the Middle East, the fulfilment of the commitments of the parties and the implementation of the resolutions of the Security Council. During the entire time, we have also called for the Council to take significant steps to alleviate tensions and strengthen the peace process. We have called for the Council to play a significant role in what we feel to be one of the most serious threats to international peace and security.

We have not been as successful in that goal as we had hoped. In recent weeks, the members of this Council unanimously agreed on what became resolution 1850 (2008), the first resolution on this topic since 2004, which broke the silence of this Council. That resolution, as Secretary of State Rice said at the time, aimed to describe "the contours of the negotiations" and to define "the role of the international community, which will prevent a return to violence and hopelessness". I repeat: "which will prevent a return to violence and hopelessness" (*S/PV.6045, p. 3*). For Russian Minister Lavrov, the resolution's aim was "to strengthen the continuity and irreversibility of the political process ... and give that approach the strength of international law" (ibid., *p. 5*). Today, the situation on the ground demonstrates that resolution 1850 (2008) was not enough to achieve those lofty aims.

Subsequently, the beginning of the Israeli military offensive generated a press statement that expressed shared concern at the escalating violence, terrorist acts, the fate of the civilian population and the terrifying humanitarian situation in Gaza. In it, the members of the Council expressed the need to reopen the way to finding a political solution to the Middle East issue. We hoped that those statements of the Council would prevent the serious situation that we are experiencing and regretting today. Unfortunately, the situation has shown that we were wrong and that it was not enough.

Today's meeting should not be a mere declaration of good intentions. Little more than three weeks ago, Minister Miliband said here that "the perils of inertia are clear; inactivity and confrontation are the recruiting sergeants for extremism" (ibid., *p. 6*). The political process and the situation on the ground are inseparable, and it is therefore necessary for this Council to demand an immediate end to all military action, using all the instruments and powers stipulated in the Charter of the United Nations.

In this Chamber, there are voices defending the errors of all the parties. For that reason, as we already said some months ago, this Council can be part of the problem and not part of the solution to the crisis in Middle East. It is important to shake off our inertia by moving away from the eye-for-an-eye approach, which only leads to the blindness of all, and by adopting a courageous position that can create an environment conducive to negotiations.

Costa Rica echoed the words of the French delegation when, in this very Chamber on 16 December, Ambassador Ripert stated "the absolute need for respect for humanitarian law" which "unreservedly prohibits terrorist acts that blindly strike civilian populations" and "also prohibits any form of collective punishment" (ibid., *p. 9*). His delegation called upon the members of the Council not to forget that those rules must provide guidance in addressing the situation in Gaza. Costa Rica supports his words.

Costa Rica is ready to contribute to the adoption of a draft resolution that urgently calls for an immediate cessation of the hostilities, the establishment of an effective and lasting truce and the opening of all border crossings with controls and guarantees accepted and respected by all, so as to allow a return to the path of negotiations that will ultimately lead to the establishment of a viable and democratic Palestinian State, living side by side with Israel and jointly promoting the well-being and development that their peoples deserve and desire.

The President (*spoke in French*): I call on the representative of Croatia.

Mr. Jurica (Croatia): I, too, would like to thank you, Sir, for convening and presiding over this very important meeting of the Security Council. I would like to begin by welcoming Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the President of the Palestinian National Authority His Excellency Mahmoud Abbas, Secretary-General of the Arab League Amre Moussa, and all the ministers present here today.

Croatia shares the sense of extreme urgency that has brought us together. I would like to convey my Government's deepest concerns at the suffering of civilians in and around Gaza and to reiterate the need to end all violence. We continue to appeal to the parties to exercise maximum restraint, to adhere to the tenets of international humanitarian law and to avoid civilian casualties. We reiterate the call for unhindered access to humanitarian assistance and supplies.

We understand that, in order to avoid an escalation of violence and the further deterioration of the humanitarian and security conditions on the ground, it is essential to achieve an immediate and permanent ceasefire that will be respected by all, put a stop to the persistent rocket attacks targeting southern Israel and end the suffering and deprivation in Gaza.

We are deeply disturbed by the latest reports of military movements into Gaza. We also understand that the Israeli military operations are not aimed at the Palestinian population, but should be seen in the context of the continuing threat coming from Hamas, which denies Israel's right to exist and has intensified the scope and frequency of its attacks on the population of southern Israel. Israel has an inherent and legitimate right to defend itself and the obligation to defend and protect its citizens. However, it is vital that civilians in Gaza be protected.

Our previous discussions have demonstrated that we all share the conviction that an effective, permanent and credible ceasefire is needed if we want to secure permanent peace and lasting improvement in the humanitarian, social and economic conditions in Gaza. We appreciate the new initiative presented to us today, which aims to secure the adoption of a Security Council resolution on that matter. It is a timely call, and my delegation is ready to work with others in bringing that forward.

In the interests of a durable and credible ceasefire, it is important that such steps not amount to returning to the status quo. Only if the conditions on the ground are such that they can guarantee a ceasefire that will be fully respected by both sides, that Israel can be assured that its population will not be exposed to the continuing terror of rocket attacks and that the smuggling of weapons by Hamas will not be tolerated can we hope to reach a sustainable solution to the crisis.

In the interests of a lasting state of calm, it is imperative that there be confidence in the mechanisms on the ground. While reiterating the call on all parties to adhere to an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire, we should not forget that the political dialogue and diplomatic efforts mean that Hamas must recognize Israel and its right to exist, abide by the commitments of the Palestine Liberation Organization and, in particular, cease the terror of daily rocket attacks that threaten the population of southern Israel.

Croatia continues to believe that a political dialogue is the only way to achieve a lasting peace based on the two-State solution. Resolution 1850 (2008), which was adopted only three weeks ago, charts the way forward. We find it essential that the Council remain guided by the objectives reaffirmed by resolution 1850 (2008) in our efforts to find a solution to this unfolding crisis.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Takasu (Japan): I would like to thank the French presidency for organizing today's extremely important meeting on the serious situation in and around Gaza. Since this is my first formal statement to the Council during the new term, I pledge on this occasion Japan's commitment to promoting global peace and security through the efficient and effective work of the Council.

Japan is deeply grateful to the Secretary-General for his statement today, which is extremely useful in addressing the serious security and humanitarian situation on the ground and for guiding our course of action. The participation of President Abbas, Secretary-General Amre Moussa of the League of Arab States and so many ministerial representatives in today's meeting clearly demonstrates the gravity and urgency of the issue at hand.

Japan is deeply concerned about the deteriorating situation in and around the Gaza Strip. We are particularly concerned that Israeli ground troops

operations are continuing in the Gaza Strip, despite urgent calls from the international community for a ceasefire. It is regrettable that there are so many Palestinian civilian casualties every day. At the same time, Japan deplores the rocket attacks against Israel from the Gaza Strip that preceded current events and are still continuing, causing serious harm to civilian life in southern Israel.

We must make every effort urgently to achieve an effective ceasefire to give assurance of calm in the area. A ceasefire can be effective only when it is immediate, permanent and fully respected. The cycle of violence must come to an end and further increases in civilian casualties must be prevented. To that end, Japan calls on Israel to exercise the utmost self-restraint. Foreign Minister Nakasone has spoken with Foreign Minister Livni, and Prime Minister Aso spoke with Prime Minister Olmert, calling for an immediate ceasefire. At the same time, Japan strongly calls on Palestinian militants and Hamas to stop attacks from the Gaza Strip against Israel.

Japan appreciates and strongly supports the regional and international intermediary efforts by concerned countries to achieve the immediate cessation of violence — most notably, the efforts on the part of President Mubarak of Egypt, the Prime Minister of Turkey, President Sarkozy of France and other political leaders, including those of the European Union, the United States and Russia. We also appreciate the efforts of the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy and representatives. We very much hope that these efforts will bear fruit very soon.

We also need to address urgently the dire humanitarian situation. Japan sympathizes deeply with the innocent civilians who are suffering in Gaza. Prime Minister Aso requested Prime Minister Olmert to take necessary measures to allow humanitarian supplies into Gaza. On 3 January, Prime Minister Aso called President Abbas to express his full support for the President and to convey Japan's condolences to the Palestinian victims. We support Palestinian unity under the leadership of President Abbas.

The people in Gaza require immediate humanitarian assistance, and Japan will provide $10 million in aid, of which $3 million will be provided immediately through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. All necessary humanitarian and economic aid should be allowed to go unhindered through the crossings. The crossings into Gaza need to be reopened, under legitimate control, in order to allow necessary supplies to reach the population in need and to provide medical treatment for the injured. In opening the crossings, we are concerned about the smuggling of arms into Gaza, which undermines the safety of crossings as well as the security of both Palestinian and Israeli civilians. Effective measures need to be taken to prevent such illegal smuggling of weapons.

Japan believes that it is important for the Security Council to address these serious issues and forge a unified voice urgently. Japan is committed to playing a constructive role in resolving the situation speedily.

Peace and stability will be attained not through violence, but through political and diplomatic means. We fully support the principles laid out in Security Council resolution 1850 (2008). A lasting peace will only be achieved through an enduring commitment to mutual recognition, freedom from violence, incitement and terror, and the two-State solution, building upon previous agreements and obligations. We must continue to encourage the moderate forces that seek peace.

Japan, along with others in the international community, stands ready to support the parties in their efforts to achieve peace. We sincerely hope that the political process will soon again be on track to realize a comprehensive, just and lasting peace.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Mexico.

Mr. Heller (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): Upon assuming its responsibilities as a member of the Security Council, Mexico would like to express its profound concern at the violence unleashed in recent days in the Gaza Strip, which has resulted in numerous victims among the Palestinian civilian population.

Mexico condemns the excessive use of force, represented by the bombardment and subsequent land operations carried out by the Israeli army in Gaza, which has now been going on for 11 days. We also condemn the launching of rockets into Israeli territory from the Gaza Strip, which has also claimed victims among the civilian population. It is necessary to break the vicious cycle of violence that, far from improving security in the region and solving the root causes of the

conflict, will only contribute to a situation of increased uncertainty and fear.

Echoing the press statement issued by the Security Council on 28 December 2008, Mexico calls for the cessation of hostilities and of all military activity in order to address the humanitarian crisis on the ground, including by opening border crossings to ensure the provision of humanitarian supplies — food, fuel and medicines — as well as to generate the minimal necessary conditions to boost peace talks in the region.

Of particular interest to Mexico is that the parties should recognize that it is imperative to respect the provisions of international humanitarian law, especially those contained in the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Mexico therefore urgently calls for the granting of access to international organizations and humanitarian aid in order to avoid further loss of human life and to guarantee the security of the civilian population, as various agencies of the United Nations have already demanded.

Peace in the Middle East, including the resolution of the Palestinian question, depends on the implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), which would lay the foundations for a peaceful and definitive solution to the conflict. The search for a comprehensive and long-term solution to the Middle East conflict is not conducted through the use of arms. Rather, that solution is linked to a political approach based on constructive dialogue, in accordance with international law and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

Resolution 1850 (2008), which the Security Council adopted on 16 December, clearly establishes that a lasting peace can only be based on an enduring commitment to mutual recognition, freedom from violence, incitement and terror, as well as on bilateral negotiations, building on previous agreements and obligations.

From the 1991 Madrid Conference and the Oslo process to the most recent efforts made through the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative and the Annapolis Conference, the imperative need to build a region in which two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, can live side by side in peace and within secure and recognized borders has become increasingly obvious. Mexico supports the efforts of the Secretary-General and the Quartet to seek an immediate cessation of military activities and to address the humanitarian crisis, as well as the essential efforts of all those neighbouring States that are genuinely interested in contributing to a lasting and mutually acceptable solution.

All States have the right to protect their security and, even more, the obligation to guarantee it for the benefit of their citizens. In their actions, however, they must comply with international humanitarian law, witnout which civilized coexistence is impossible. Likewise, all terrorist activities, which run counter to the achievement of a political solution that guarantees respect for the right of peoples to a stable and lasting peace, must be stopped. In that context, it is essential to put an end to illegal trafficking in weapons and military equipment, and to all activities that promote terrorism.

The Security Council must contribute decisively to finding a solution to the conflict, support the peace process and build confidence in the quest for a political solution. The credibility and effectiveness of the Security Council in shouldering its responsibility to promote international peace and security depend on that. The Council must constructively propose guidelines that will help to create a more favourable atmosphere for negotiations and a just and lasting peace process, not just react to immediate events.

Finally, Mexico believes that, given the continued deterioration of the situation on the ground, including the Israeli bombing of a United Nations school today, the efforts of the international community — including the initiative announced today by President Mubarak of Egypt — must come together in an operational resolution aimed at finding a solution to the conflict in all its aspects. That will require that the Security Council define and establish a monitoring mechanism that guarantees observance of the ceasefire by the parties, as well as other commitments to be undertaken in various areas referred to during this debate, in order to create an environment conducive to achieving a lasting peace in the region. Mexico is willing to support a Security Council resolution containing those elements.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on the representative of Uganda.

Mr. Butagira (Uganda): Uganda is pleased to see you, Mr. Minister, chairing this important meeting. I wish to thank you for organizing this meeting, given the situation in the Middle East.

At the outset, I wish to acknowledge the presence in our midst today of His Excellency President Mahmoud Abbas and the Foreign Ministers of various countries. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

Uganda has followed with deep concern the escalation of violence in the region. This has had a disastrous impact on the civilian population, with many lives lost and livelihoods disrupted. The humanitarian tragedy is shameful and must be put to an end. The violence further complicates efforts to reach a negotiated and peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, even more so after the Council, a few weeks ago, unanimously adopted resolution 1850 (2008).

Much as we are appalled by the ongoing violence and counter-violence, I do not think that we will do justice if we do not also address what was the immediate cause of this escalation. So, we must not keep silent on the issue of rockets being fired at Israel, injuring civilians. At the same time, we must not turn a blind eye to what Israel's response has been in relation to the unfolding tragedy. In other words, we should be balanced and look at the picture in toto.

That said, the escalation is a reminder that the international community, and the Council in particular, should remain firmly engaged, working with the parties to achieve a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. That will be achieved only through negotiations between the parties with the support of the international community. It is for that reason that Uganda welcomes this meeting, as it serves as a reminder to the Palestinians, the Israelis and the international community of our obligation to support peace. To that end, we call for and support intra-Palestinian reconciliation, national dialogue and unity.

Given the current escalation, the first priority is an immediate end to the violence. My delegation has called for an immediate and permanent ceasefire whose implementation must be monitored to ensure full compliance. Uganda would like to express its support for those who have called for a ceasefire that is durable and sustainable. The Council would be engaged in a futile exercise if we called for a ceasefire only to return to the situation that prevailed earlier. In other words, the ceasefire must not be abused by those who might wish to cause violence. Thus, it must be sustainable and durable and must be monitored effectively.

Secondly, there is an urgent need for access to Gaza for humanitarian assistance. The ceasefire will facilitate that, but the border crossings should also be opened in order to improve the humanitarian situation.

Uganda will continue to support all efforts aimed at reducing tension and achieving a comprehensive peace in the Middle East, consistent with the relevant United Nations resolutions. We commend all those countries and organizations, particularly the Arab League, that have worked tirelessly in recent days in pursuit of that goal.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on the representative of China.

Mr. Zhang Yesui (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): At the outset, I wish to thank His Excellency Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his briefing. We welcome the presence at today's meeting of His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian National Authority; Mr. Amre Moussa, Secretary General of the League of Arab States; and the Foreign Ministers of a number of Arab countries.

China is greatly concerned at the heavy casualties and the loss of property caused by the most recent outbreak of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and is deeply worried about the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza. The top priority now is for the parties concerned to achieve an immediate ceasefire to avoid further civilian casualties. We urge Israel to halt its military operation immediately and open all the border crossings in Gaza to ensure unfettered access of humanitarian supplies to the area. The armed Palestinian faction also needs to stop its rocket firings. We urge the international community to provide further assistance to ease the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

The Security Council, which shoulders the primary responsibility for maintaining world peace and security, has every reason to play an active role. Regrettably, however, the three emergency meetings held by the Council since the outbreak of the conflict have achieved no result. We hope the Council will respond to the will of the international community and the appeal of Arab States and take swift actions to adopt a resolution so as to send a positive and clear

signal to the parties concerned and push for an immediate ceasefire.

China always opposes the use of force in settling disputes and condemns all violent activities against civilians. What has happened over the past 60 years shows that military means are not a way out of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The cycle of violence does no good to either side and cannot bring about security for any party. We hope that the parties concerned will exercise maximum restraint, exhibit courage and wisdom and continue to resolve their differences through dialogue.

We call on the international community to make vigorous efforts for the peace process, push for a just and equitable settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian issue and work towards real and enduring peace in the area.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now invite the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, His Excellency Mr. Alexander Yakovenko.

Mr. Yakovenko (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I am pleased to greet you, Mr. Minister, in the President's chair. We have listened to your statement with great interest, and also to the assessments put forward by the Secretary-General, by President Abbas and by the various ministers.

The Russian Federation is deeply concerned by the serious escalation of the crisis in Gaza since the beginning of the Israeli ground operation. These current tragic developments are fraught with potential for further destabilization of the situation in the Palestinian territories and in the Middle East in general. The information coming in through the United Nations channels attests to the many civilian victims. The situation in Gaza has become a humanitarian disaster.

Humanitarian deliveries and evacuations of the wounded in Gaza must be allowed to ease the situation in that sector. The civilian population's safety cannot be ensured while there are widespread military operations under way in Gaza. If this is not ended in the near term, then the number of victims will be much greater. In this alarming situation, Russia sent humanitarian assistance on 2 January through Egypt to the population of Gaza. We are preparing a second delivery. An air-mobile hospital from the Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations will also be deployed in the conflict zone.

Today, the views put forward repeatedly by the Council and the international community are more relevant than ever in determining an end to the situation. There needs to be a guarantee here that there will be no resumption of violence. We are certain that tanks and aircraft, just like rocket attacks, will not resolve any of the challenges facing the region. The advancement of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the region is possible only via a peace dialogue and implementation by the parties of all relevant international obligations.

It is particularly concerning that the dramatic situation in the Gaza area began when there were increased international efforts for an Arab-Israeli settlement. Essentially, preparations were under way for convening the Moscow meeting. It is necessary to ensure that these efforts will be successful. But for that to happen, we need above all to address the Gaza crisis through political means. In this regard, we have been interested in the peace initiative advanced by President Mubarak of Egypt and President Sarkozy of France. The steps needed for a peaceful settlement to the crisis in Gaza are being pursued actively by the Russian leadership, which has been in intensive contact with all Middle East and international parties without exception. The end to this crisis is dependent upon them.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now invite His Royal Highness Prince Saud Al-Faisal, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia, to take the floor.

Prince Al-Faisal (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): We meet today as the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip continue to suffer hugely from a savage aggression that is unrelenting and unforgiving at the hand of the Israeli war machine. It has led to the deaths of hundreds and wounded thousands, including children, women and the elderly. It has caused terrific destruction to property and infrastructure.

It is a wide human catastrophe that has beset Gaza: overall death and destruction. Israel has turned its munitions falling from the sky into an unbearable hell on the ground, using every conceivable weapon of destruction invented by the human mind to scourge by fire an unarmed people besieged from the air, the land and the sea. The destruction and killing during the aerial bombardment seem insufficient to slake the Israelis' thirst or indeed to convince the Security Council to move swiftly and immediately to prevent

the further escalation expected in such grave circumstances.

The call for the convening of this meeting proceeds from our appreciation of what is expected from the Security Council in such circumstances, as provided by the Charter of the United Nations. The Security Council is the body entrusted with the maintenance of international peace and security. Although the provisions of the Charter state that when a certain conflict leads to fighting as soon as possible, it seems that the Security Council has set that role aside this time. The Israeli aggression against Gaza has continued for more than 11 days now. This places a big question mark over the credibility of the Security Council and the entire system of international peace and security.

What we find astonishing and surprising is the deafening silence in the face of the attack on Gaza. Indeed, some claim that the operation is nothing more than Israel exercising its right to self-defence. While following, for example, the armed conflict in Georgia, we saw the international community move most urgently and effectively and mobilize all measures necessary to contain the situation, end the conflict and ensure a withdrawal of forces. Palestinian blood continues to be shed. Destruction is spreading in a way that cannot be justified in any way whatsoever.

War no longer evokes glory and pride, only rage and condemnation on the part of the international community. What is happening in Gaza now can only be described as a horrendous humanitarian crime that will only lead to more violence and extremism and put the goal of peace and security, which Israel uses to justify its acts of aggression, further out of reach.

Israel's security can be achieved only by the establishment of a just peace that responds to the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. Those rights have been recognized in instruments of international legitimacy, including Security Council resolutions. They have also been affirmed by the Geneva Conventions and enshrined in every agreement and initiative put forth to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including the Arab Peace Initiative.

Israel bears full responsibility for the grave situation and the ferocious siege on the Palestinian people and the closure of crossing points. Israel violated the truce agreed by the two parties in June 2008, in return for a ceasefire and an understanding that the crossing points would be opened and the siege lifted. The Palestinian side fulfilled its obligations under the agreement, whereas Israel maintained its stranglehold on 1.5 million Palestinians in Gaza — an immoral act and humanitarian tragedy to which the international community failed to respond.

In referring to that painful reality, our goal is not to engage in unproductive arguments; rather, it is to describe the situation as it is and to prompt us to work seriously towards a ceasefire that will end the armed conflict that is causing death and destruction in Gaza as we speak. There is no way out of this crisis but through a clear and explicit resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire and the lifting of the siege.

The members of the League of Arab States have today presented the Security Council with the resolution adopted by the extraordinary meeting of the League's foreign ministers held in Cairo on 31 December 2008. That document formulates a vision for a resolution to the crisis on the basis of an immediate halt to all military action in Gaza, the lifting of the siege, the opening of the crossing points and an end to the policy of collective punishment imposed on Palestinians that led to this serious deterioration. The Arab proposal aims both at putting an end to the military operation and at addressing the causes that led to it. Lifting the siege, calming the situation and establishing the necessary monitoring mechanism will ensure a lasting solution. That will serve to meet Israel's security concerns and pave the way for a resumption of the peace process and the revitalization of negotiations to end the occupation and establish an independent, viable Palestinian State. That is the only way to ensure the security of Israel and Palestine, as well as the security and stability of the region.

Arab countries are committed to international law, the principles of international legitimacy and the resolutions of the Security Council. Unfortunately, we are confronted by delays, procrastination and attempts to undermine the peace efforts of Arab countries. Either the Security Council must address our legitimate issues responsibly and seriously on the basis of those principles or we shall be forced to turn our backs and consider other options.

Palestinians are dying at this very moment. Children are being orphaned. Parents are losing loved ones for no reason save for the fact of where they find

themselves. Is the Council going to allow that to continue for even another hour?

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Amre Moussa, Secretary General of the League of Arab States.

Mr. Moussa (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I should like to extend our congratulations to you, Mr. President, on France's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the first month of the new year. France will thereby shoulder its share of responsibility for addressing the grave situation in the Middle East — a historic role that will also resonate in the region. I should also like to express our appreciation for the efforts of French President Sarkozy to urgently and seriously address Israel's grave and indiscriminate acts of aggression against the Gaza Strip without distinction between civilians and non-civilians. I would also like to commend the former President of the Council on his presidency.

As many speakers before me have stated, it has now been 11 days since Israeli occupation forces began the aerial, naval and ground bombardment of the Gaza Strip that has resulted in an extremely tense and dangerous situation. A military occupying force is attacking a territory under its own occupation, blockading it and isolating its population on the pretext that the Palestinian resistance is launching rockets that threaten the security of the inhabitants of southern Israel — as if the people of Gaza were not themselves also endangered by weapon fire.

Today we learned of the bombing of a Palestinian school where Palestinians had taken shelter, and of the resulting dozens of deaths. We also heard the briefing by Mr. Maxwell Gaylard, United Nations humanitarian coordinator for the Palestinian territories, who stated that

(*spoke in English*)

> "People could not reach available food. Children are hungry, cold, without electricity and running water. And above all, they are terrified. That, by any measure, is a humanitarian crisis".

(*spoke in Arabic*)

Can the Security Council remain silent in the face of such a situation?

While reaffirming its well-known position on the need to provide protection for civilians in time of war, the League of Arab States would also like to reiterate that it is keen to provide protection for Palestinian and Israeli civilians alike. However, we would also like to put things in their proper perspective. We are essentially dealing with a situation of Israeli military occupation of Palestinian territories and its consequences vis-à-vis the rejection of that occupation by the population. As part and parcel of the occupied territories, Gaza has suffered long and disproportionately under the strangulating aerial, naval and ground blockade that has led to the complete destruction of its infrastructure. That is in addition to the repeated starvation campaigns resulting from the closing of crossing points between Israel and Gaza and the ongoing refusal to allow basic goods to enter Gaza.

If we allow the Israeli propaganda machine to describe the situation regarding the psychological repercussions suffered by some inhabitants of southern Israel because of Hamas rocket attacks, how can we possibly ignore the humanitarian tragedy to which the entire population of Palestine is subject due to the military Israeli occupation and the complete blockade within which millions of Palestinians have to live?

Furthermore, if the Israelis reassert the claim that their armed action is being carried out in self-defence, to combat terrorism, and that what is happening now is actually part of the war on terror, then the time has come to denounce this untrue claim. The whole situation is due to the occupation. The whole world wants to see an end to that occupation, which has led to an extremely unstable situation. Continued Israeli aggression and actions against civilians have generated tension and rage in the Arab and Islamic world as a whole. This situation will not be helped by efforts that do not put an end to the events taking place in Gaza.

Once again, I would like to repeat the Arab rejection of attacks against innocent civilians on either side. The facts indicate that civilians on the Palestinian side are the primary victims not only of the most recent events, but also of the situation that prevailed before the current hostilities. I reiterate that the facts indicate that civilian Palestinian victims are in the hundreds as compared to one victim on the Israeli side.

Occupation is not the only reason for the current hostilities. There is also the failure of the peace process, the slightest progress in which would have calmed the situation. The lack of such progress has created a feeling of frustration and despair. We hope

that 2009 will mark a new beginning for the peace process that will enable us to address seriously and sincerely the most important problem — the Israeli occupation of Arab territories and its rejection of the establishment of a Palestinian State.

The time has come to put an end to all procrastination and delays, which will only lead to further humanitarian and material losses. The time has come to put an end to the siege, to aggression, to the confiscation of land and to its partition by Israeli settlers, none of which can lead to a healthy situation. The events in Gaza today as a result of this unhealthy situation is proof of that. The may actually spin out of control if we cannot put an immediate end to it through this Council.

The Security Council is the main body of the United Nations entrusted with the maintenance of international peace and security. The credibility of the Council in shouldering its responsibilities and the credibility of the United Nations are both at stake today. The Security Council should deal with such situations firmly, justly and objectively in a manner that furthers the goal of maintaining international peace and security.

Here, I would like to pay tribute to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and express to him our deep appreciation for his important statement today and for his position on the aggression against Gaza. I would also like to pay tribute to the United Nations entities that are working in extremely difficult circumstances over there, in particular the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

We have repeatedly complained of the Security Council's failure to swiftly take a firm position in addressing extremely serious situations that may threaten international peace and security. A serious precedent was set in 2006 when Israel attacked Lebanon and the Security Council did not take action for over a month, hoping that Israel would achieve its goals if given enough time. When that did not happen, the Security Council had to act. Israel had already stopped fearing the consequences of its continued aggression. We do not want a repeat of that tragedy.

The high-level Arab delegation is here for the next few days, and we are more than willing to help the Council if it is ready to shoulder its responsibilities. However, we cannot give Israel enough time to achieve its objectives; that is something that we cannot accept or be part of.

Here, I would like to mention a statement made yesterday by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Israel. Israel called upon the world to allow it to work to achieve its objectives until it declares to have done so. This was printed today in the New York Times. This is a clear message addressed to the Security Council. It must be clear that all these messages are addressed to us and we must react to them.

We have therefore insisted on presenting to the Council the draft resolution mentioned by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, His Royal Highness the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia and the President of Palestine.

The fact is that the Council has come under attack. Certain unusual remarks have been made by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Israel describing Security Council resolutions as "dead letters". Many might support her in her opinion, and that would be confirmed if the Security Council should fail to stand firm and address these threats to international peace and security. As stated by the Arab Group's representative on the Security Council, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, we are submitting a draft resolution in this regard, because the situation cannot wait any longer.

We have expressed our support for the initiative enunciated by President Mubarak and President Sarkozy. We see no contradiction between that initiative and the work of the Security Council. In fact, they complement each other. President Mubarak has stated that Egypt, which has opened the door to peace in the Middle East, cannot accept a continuation of the current situation, including procrastination by the Security Council in shouldering its responsibilities. Because the Security Council refuses to take action, the Egyptian and French Presidents have had to act, not to confront the Security Council, but rather to complement what we do here, since our objectives are the same.

Therefore, we support the initiative of the two Presidents while also insisting on formally making the position of the Arab Group very clear before the Council. We call for an immediate and lasting ceasefire, an end to all hostilities, violence and rocket attacks, a withdrawal by the Israeli forces, an end to the blockade and the opening of the crossings between

Israel and Gaza. We demand that Israel, as the occupying military Power of the Palestinian territories, allow for the safe passage of humanitarian assistance, medical aid, food and fuel to Gaza. We call for the establishment of a monitoring mechanism to provide protection to civilians, for a ceasefire and for restoration of calm in general.

In conclusion, I would like to say that we have carefully listened as every speaker has highlighted the importance of ensuring that the events in Gaza are not repeated in the future and of the absolute need to move effectively and quickly to end the crisis and to resume negotiations towards a solution to the Israeli/Palestinian and Israeli-Arab conflict.

We hope that, with a new Administration, this year will augur well for the peace process. We have seen certain progress on that track, and we in the Arab League will always be prepared to participate in any peace effort that represents a true move towards the objective sought by all of us, which is being impeded by Israeli practices in the occupied territories in complete disregard of Arab and international appeals. Here, I would also like to object to what was stated by our colleague from Israel that the world is divided between moderates and extremists. Yes, we agree. However, we may disagree over who are the moderates and who are the extremists. We also believe that there are even more divisions within those divisions — that is, between those who respect the provisions of international law and those who do not.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor His Excellency Mr. Jonas Støre, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Norway.

Mr. Støre (Norway): I am grateful for this opportunity to address the Security Council on the critical situation in Gaza. As Norwegian Foreign Minister, I add my voice tonight to all those who demand an immediate, effective and verifiable ceasefire and cessation of hostilities. The launching of rockets by Hamas targeting civilians inside Israel must stop. The Israeli shelling of Gaza from the air, sea and land must stop. Norway condemns the heavy ground operations that are exposing thousands and thousands of civilians and killing innocent women, men and children.

That escalation does not lead to peace and security for Israelis and Palestinians. It is a dreadful road to death, destruction, hatred and more desperation. It is a recipe for revenge and more terror. Political goals, however legitimate, will not be reached through war, military onslaught and destruction. After this war will come the day when the people of Gaza and Israel will still live next to each other. Palestinians will still be deprived of their unity and of their State, and Israelis will still be deprived of security.

The Security Council, which has the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, has so far been incapable of making any decision in the matter. That is a fact that I have a hard time trying to explain to the people of my country, who, together with hundreds of millions around the world, see the flickering television images of great human suffering day in and day out. Today, the news of the shelling of the school where people had sought refuge shocked us even more.

I therefore hope that the French-Egyptian initiative for an immediate ceasefire will succeed. As that initiative takes shape, I would hope that the details will be confirmed by a Security Council resolution.

A ceasefire must not be a return to the status quo ante, and therefore a ceasefire and the political process must address the critical outstanding issues: a stop to smuggling and the clandestine import of arms and their accessories and the immediate opening of border crossings for urgent humanitarian needs, followed by the presence of international monitors. Then, and soon, we need to address the challenge of new and urgent human needs caused by the current violence.

That is also why I would like to take the opportunity tonight to address the Security Council as Chair of the donor support group to the Palestinian Authority, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians (AHLC). As members will remember, just one year ago, Norway and France, together with the European Commission and Quarter Representative Tony Blair, hosted the donor conference for the Palestinians in Paris. That was a very successful undertaking thanks to France. The donor community made significant pledges both to the running of Palestinian Authority institutions and to the projects that could help boost the Palestinian economy.

In May last year in London, the AHLC reviewed the progress made by both the donors and the Palestinian Authority. Four months later, we noted further progress as we convened the AHLC here in

New York with the assistance of the Secretary-General, despite the numerous obstacles created by the occupation, the limits to access and movement and the growing number of settlements on Palestinian land.

Throughout recent years, Gaza has been a major concern, not least as a result of internal Palestinian strife and division, but also as a result of the Israeli siege on the enclave. Before the outbreak of the war, the isolation of Gaza had devastated the private sector, increased poverty and malnutrition and undermined the social and economic fabric of Gaza. The civilian population has been caged and severely traumatized.

As this ongoing war escalates, the supplies of water and energy, which were already insufficient, have more or less completely stopped. The main sewage plant in the north of Gaza is on the verge of collapse. We urgently need to address this humanitarian disaster. Two days ago, I received a letter from the Palestinian Authority Prime Minister, Salam Fayyad, outlining the budgetary outlook of the Authority for 2009. Despite some limited progress, deplorably the Palestinian economy will continue to depend on donors for a long time to come. Now, we need to add the consequences of the devastation in Gaza and the dire consequences that the war is having for the people, for the infrastructure and for the economy.

In consultation with Prime Minister Fayyad and the co-Chairs of the AHLC, Norway had originally planned to convene the AHLC some time during the first half of 2009. Under the present circumstances, I propose that the AHLC be convened as soon as possible. The situation is new and requires urgent action. The humanitarian needs demand relief. I ask for the Council's support for the holding of a special donor conference for Gaza, in conjunction with the AHLC meeting, as soon as possible.

When the hostilities cease, we need to start assessing both the immediate and the long-term needs. Those will have to be determined by a fact-finding and assessment mission led by the World Bank and the United Nations. Before then, we must immediately ease the suffering of the civilian population. International humanitarian law is crystal clear. Civilians should and must be protected. It is unacceptable that Hamas exposes civilians by taking its military arsenal and its fighting to densely populated areas. We call on Israel to comply with its obligations under the Geneva Conventions to allow the unhindered access of humanitarian supplies to Gaza. We urgently call on Israel to ensure that food, water and medicines gain access and unhindered distribution to the civilian population. We must empower the most effective providers of humanitarian assistance to conduct their activities; the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East is critical in that context.

I should like to add one point. Since the beginning of hostilities, independent reporters have been denied access to the war zone. That is regrettable and unacceptable. We demand of Israel that reporters be allowed to do their regular work inside Gaza.

Finally, the division among Palestinians is a tragedy. Let me commend President Mubarak and Egypt for their steadfast efforts to heal that division, for which the citizens of Gaza have already paid a high price. The question of the governance of Gaza must be addressed. The people of Gaza deserve stable, democratic and peaceful governance. A power vacuum in Gaza after the end of hostilities will further plunge the civilian population into misery. In that context, I welcome President Abbas's call for a national unity Government and the holding of elections.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Norway for the initiatives he has just announced.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Egypt.

Mr. Aboul Gheit (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is 10 days since the start of the Israeli military aggression against the Gaza Strip. It is 10 days since the start of an operation of killing and methodical destruction by Israel against the people of Gaza. It is 10 days, and Israel is telling us daily that it is about to achieve its military objectives, while the media are showing us daily, nay hourly, horrific scenes of the bodies of children laid next to each other, families that have been completely decimated and innocent civilians who have been crushed by the Israeli military machine — almost 600 to date and 3,000 thousand wounded, and the Council is still silent.

We cannot imagine what the Council needs to assume its responsibility to stop that aggression. Does it need more Palestinians killed and wounded before it takes a decision that would commit Israel to stop its military action? Perhaps it requires another solution

that would give the occupying Power some political gains as another way of crowning its military aggression. In this respect, the Council stalling has undermined its credibility and the confidence of our peoples in the Council and in its neutrality and objectivity in dealing with the Palestinian question.

As members know very well, Egypt is in a unique situation as far as the current events are concerned, as the immediately adjacent neighbour of the Gaza Strip, where the Israeli aggression is taking place, and because its central role in having helped the Israelis and Palestinians attain a period of calm that lasted six months until just one week before the aggression and despite violations by both sides. Furthermore, Egypt is in a well-known position in view of its role in sponsoring the Palestinian national reconciliation.

I should like to explain our view of a way out of this situation. Let me quote from the statement made this evening by President Mubarak in a joint press conference with President Sarkozy:

> "The situation in Gaza continues to deteriorate for a second week, with continual destructive and deadly Israeli attacks targeting innocent civilians, causing tensions to escalate and undermining regional stability.
>
> "Egypt, which opened the door to peace in the Middle East and has supported the Palestinian cause for 60 years, cannot accept a continuation of the current situation, with the Palestinian and Israeli sides clinging to their positions and the Security Council delaying the fulfilment of its responsibilities.
>
> "Egypt has been pursuing active efforts since the first day of the hostilities, and today I am putting forward an initiative specifically designed to contain the situation, based on the following elements.
>
> "First, Israel and the Palestinian factions shall agree to an immediate ceasefire for a specified period to allow the opening of corridors for aid to the inhabitants of the Strip and to allow Egypt to pursue efforts towards a complete and permanent ceasefire.
>
> "Secondly, Egypt calls on Israel and the Palestinian sides to meet immediately to conclude arrangements and guarantees to prevent a repetition of the present escalation. The causes of that escalation, including the question of securing the borders, should be addressed to allow for the reopening of border crossings and the lifting of the blockade. Egypt is prepared to take part in these discussions along with the Palestinian and Israeli sides, and with the European Union and the other members of the Quartet.
>
> "Thirdly, Egypt renews its call on the Palestinian National Authority and all Palestinian factions to respond to Egyptian efforts to bring about Palestinian reconciliation, which is indispensable for overcoming the challenges facing the Palestinian people and the Palestinian cause both in the current critical situation and in the future.
>
> "Egypt is carrying out its responsibility in putting forward this initiative and expects the Israeli and Palestinian sides, as well as other regional and international parties, to fulfil their responsibilities in order to stop the bloodshed and renew hopes for peace."

I would also like to reaffirm a crucial point: the Gaza Strip is an integral part of the Palestinian territory that was occupied by Israel in 1967 — which also includes the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Therefore, the occupying Power has responsibilities towards the population of the land that it occupies. This responsibility is well-known and must be recognized.

Since the beginning of the Israeli aggression, on 27 December, Egypt has made extensive efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to the affected population in the Gaza Strip. In this respect, Egypt has since the first day used the Rafah crossing to enable individuals to deliver some assistance in the form of small shipments. The Egyptian Red Crescent, in cooperation with the Palestinian side, has been able to deliver some 120 tons of medicines and other medical supplies through the crossing, in addition to some 300 additional tones of foodstuffs through the Karam Abu Salem crossing. Egyptian hospitals have so far received 120 injured persons and we are making preparations to receive more wounded as the Palestinian side is able and willing to transfer them outside the Strip. Moreover, since yesterday, we have sent approximately 500 tons of foodstuffs via Al-Aouja through Karam Abu Salem crossing and onwards to the Strip.

Here I would like to express our thanks to all the sisterly Arab and Islamic countries which offered their services, especially medical services, to relieve the suffering of the Palestinians in Gaza through Egypt. Egypt has adequate capacity and will to deal with the situation, and we will continue our extensive efforts to deliver all the assistance from our brothers to the Gaza Strip despite the current difficulties.

We have come here as an Arab ministerial delegation to demonstrate the utmost importance attached by all Arab countries to ending this aggression immediately and to ridding the Palestinians of the horrors of the Israeli military machine. But this does not prevent us from calling upon the Council not to turn a blind eye to the current events or to overlook the fact that the main tragedy lies in the continued Israeli occupation of Palestinian land. The effort that truly must be made is the effort to end the occupation as soon as possible and establish an independent Palestinian State, with full and intensified international support and encouragement for the negotiations that are necessary to achieve our aim, as provided for in Council resolution 1850 (2008).

I am certain that this is the real objective and that it should not be overlooked by the Council. This requires extensive efforts and follow-up by the Council, as provided for in the resolution to which I have just referred.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Egypt for his proposals.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Salah Bashir, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Jordan.

Mr. Bashir (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): Permit me at the outset to express our gratitude to you, Mr. President, for responding to our request for an open meeting and for working with us over the past two days to achieve a result that will put an end to the human tragedy unfolding in the Gaza Strip. Jordan feels deep pain and concern at the grave situation, the escalation of violence and the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip as a result of the irresponsible and horrendous military aggression carried out by Israel, in addition to its effects on the peace process and the stability of our region, which has long suffered from the scourge of war.

In addition to condemning this aggression, which has claimed the lives of hundreds of innocent civilians, we call on the international community, led by the Security Council, to shoulder its political, moral and legal responsibilities by adopting a draft resolution that will force Israel to end to its aggression and its policies of collective punishment against Palestinian civilians and will alleviate the human suffering caused by its military operations, which are a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law, the Fourth Geneva Convention and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The people and the Government of Jordan are fully committed to supporting the Palestinian people in their humanitarian crisis. His Majesty King Abdullah Bin Al Hussein has from the beginning of the aggression intensified his contacts with various political leaders throughout the world in order to achieve an immediate cessation of hostilities through the Security Council. His Majesty the King has ordered that all Jordanian hospitals be opened, that all Jordanian capacities be placed at the service of our Palestinian brothers and that field hospitals be prepared and sent to Gaza. Hashemite charitable associations are doing their utmost, and all of Jordan is prepared to work around the clock to ensure the delivery of international humanitarian assistance through its territory.

Peace and security cannot be achieved by carrying out military operations against a population whose men, women, children and the elderly have already been weakened by the siege. Those operations will not help Israel, but will only arouse feelings of anger among Arabs and Muslims throughout the world.

What we are now witnessing is inhuman Israeli exploitation of the situation aimed at achieving false internal gains. What Israel is doing does not reflect a genuine interest in peace. Peace cannot be achieved by shedding the blood of Palestinian children; peace cannot be achieved by ignoring the appeals of the international community; peace cannot be achieved by violating international law, in particular those provisions that impose responsibilities on occupying forces towards their occupied population. Israel cannot achieve security by killing innocent unarmed civilians in the Gaza Strip, by targeting schools, universities and houses of worship and by creating a humanitarian tragedy for the Palestinian people. Past experiences have proved those truths, and this aggression will be no exception.

The Arab States have submitted a draft resolution to the Security Council calling for a ceasefire. We have worked and will continue working with the Council to draft balanced language resulting in a resolution that will fulfil the Council's objective of maintaining international peace and security. It would be senseless should the Council fail, despite the urgency and immediacy of the situation, to adopt a resolution that would put an end to the sufferings of the Palestinians. That would mean that our humanity had been defeated by Israel's intransigence.

Has the international community reached the point where it can turn a blind eye to the killing, displacement, fear and hunger that have been imposed on the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip? Does the work of the Council now serve the interests of one party, without taking international humanitarian responsibilities into consideration? The international community must recognize the rights of the people of Gaza. The international community must not fail to respond to their appeals and must stop justifying their continued suffering with the Israeli excuse of self-defence. The Security Council must recall that for more than 40 years the Gaza Strip and all the Palestinian territories have been subjected to an aggression called military occupation.

The international community must shoulder its responsibilities by providing the Palestinians with protection and humanitarian assistance, by addressing what is now occurring in Gaza and by dealing with the conspiracy aimed at destroying the future of the Palestinian people and their inalienable rights, including the right to establish an independent Palestinian State.

Today, the international community must impose a ceasefire in order to stop the bloodshed. It must establish arrangements that will prevent further deterioration of the situation by alleviating the humanitarian and economic distress of the Palestinian people, putting an end to all military operations and compelling Israel to withdraw to the positions it occupied before 27 December 2008, to life the siege, to open all border crossings under its control and to permit medical and humanitarian assistance and the evacuation of the wounded.

The international community must support and facilitate the work of United Nations agencies and organs create an international monitoring mechanism to supervise the ceasefire, protect the Palestinian people and ensure that all parties carry out their obligations with a view to the emergence of Gaza from the destruction it is suffering and the establishment of an independent, contiguous and viable Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Israel must understand that peace can be achieved only through dialogue and serious negotiations that will provide the Palestinian Authority with legitimacy in order to fulfil the aspirations of the Palestinian people to establish an independent, viable and contiguous State. Returning to the negotiating table is the only way to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in accordance with international legitimacy, including the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Israel's use of extensive military force not only threatens the stability of the region, but also undermines all efforts by the Security Council to achieve peace in the Middle East in accordance with resolution 1850 (2008). It also threatens the entire peace process aimed at finding a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict based on the two-State formula, which is a sine qua non for peace and stability in the region.

Jordan has great hopes for the sincere and extensive efforts of the Security Council and appreciates the Egyptian initiative, which should serve as an incentive to make progress in ending this tragic situation, by providing humanitarian assistance to the brotherly Palestinian people, alleviating their suffering and returning to serious negotiations in order to achieve the two-State solution, which is the only way to ensure security and stability in the region.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Mr. Fawzi Salloukh, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Lebanon.

Mr. Salloukh (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): First of all, Mr. President, I would like to thank you, as well as your friendly country, for your sustained efforts and for clear, unequivocal position on the need for an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire following Israeli aggression against Gaza. We would also like to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his tireless efforts and resolve.

We have come to speak to the Council on behalf of the thousands of civilian casualties who have fallen

in Gaza — on behalf of the children, women and other innocent Palestinians, who continue to fall on an ongoing basis under Israeli bombings. I speak on behalf of the inhabitants of Gaza, who for decades now have lived under blockade, occupation and a policy of collective punishment.

We have come to say that every minute this continues, it claims an additional innocent victim and increases the number of orphans, widows and disabled persons. As a result, the legal, political and above all moral duty and responsibility of the Council require it to adopt immediately and without further delay a clear and binding resolution calling for an immediate and complete ceasefire, the lifting of the unjust air, land and sea blockade imposed by Israel on Gaza, and the opening of all crossing points.

We must not lose sight of the fact that the Israeli aggression hardly begin on 27 December 2008. In fact, it has been going on for decades through occupation, oppression, suffocating blockade, the closure of crossing points, limitations imposed on the daily routines and subsistence of Palestinians, denying them the right to a decent life. Gaza remains under occupation and, as the Council knows, occupation is the most abject form of aggression. The siege persists, and the blockade is another form of aggression.

This blind violence and these systematic crimes by Israel are not aimed at a specific faction of the Palestinian people, as is claimed by Israel. Israel seeks first and foremost to undermine hope in the hearts of the Palestinian people for a decent and safe life that would allow them to fully recover their legitimate rights through the option of peace and international legitimacy. The dangers of Israel's aggression are not confined to its direct actions because they also contribute to the exacerbation of bitterness and hatred by undermining all hope for a future and a better day tomorrow.

Because they jeopardize the peace process, usurping force and the killing of civilians cannot achieve security. Quite the contrary, a true and lasting peace can only be the fruit of a credible political process that engenders hope for a better future for people. Consequently, it is vital that we achieve an immediate, permanent and unconditional ceasefire with the immediate withdrawal of Israel to pre-27 December 2008 Israeli positions; end the blockade and reopen crossing points; and normalize life by authorizing without delay access for humanitarian convoys to those in need. We must ensure that the Palestinian people are not once again targeted by Israeli aggression, because regardless of Israeli's claims, the Palestinian people are unarmed when compared to the behemoth of the Israeli army.

We must also note Israel's responsibility, as the occupying Power, for practices that are at odds with international law and particularly international humanitarian law, which require us to provide appropriate protection for the Palestinian people. We hope that the Council will not repeat the errors 2006, when it acted late in putting an end to the Israeli killing of the people of Lebanon. That is why we truly hope that the Council will be able to take up the challenge, that it will not disappoint unarmed civilians and that it will be up to the task of upholding its responsibilities to all humankind. In fact, this is a trial which we must all undergo successfully. May we all live up to that responsibility, because we would not wish to burden our conscience with more massacres, such as that perpetrated by Israel today by targeting the UNRWA school in Jabaliya.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Taïb Fassi Fihri, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Morocco.

Mr. Fassi Fihri (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Security Council's meeting today regarding the very crucial and difficult situation in the Middle East — the result of the horrendous Israeli aggression against the Palestinian territories in Gaza. The continuous menace has lasted for 11 days, the last four of which have witnessed ever more serious escalations as a result of the air, land and sea operations by the Israeli military machine. Israel has used every indiscriminate lethal weapon, destroying homes and their occupants, exterminating entire families and creating orphaned children and infants. Indeed, neither the mosques, nor the schools, nor the funeral homes, nor the ambulances have escaped the might of the Israeli military machine, which has left a broad swath of destruction of property and infrastructure. There has been heart-wrenching and horrendous bloodshed, murder and the killing of innocent civilians.

This painful situation imposes a special responsibility on the French presidency of the Security Council. You, Mr. President, represent a State that has been fully versed in all aspects of the issue before the

Council for more than half a century. This issue has many emotional and political implications, as recognized in the proactive and responsible initiative to harmonize positions undertaken in the context of the President Sarkozy's visit to the countries of the region.

I would also like to commend His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon and thank him for the firm and principled positions he has taken since the beginning of Israel's aggression against the Gaza Strip.

The level and mandate of the committee of the League of Arab States attest clearly to the grave concern of people in Arab countries with regard to the seriousness of the situation in Gaza and its implications for the peace and stability of the region as a whole. They also reflect the concern and commitment of Arab countries to responsibly and constructively adopting and implementing the decisive political positions called for by current events.

The eyes of the whole world are on the Council today. The world is hoping that it will assume its responsibilities by putting an end to the bloodbath, maintaining international peace and security and compelling Israel to immediately halt the activities of its military machine and lift the siege on the Palestinian people, who have suffered hugely from the scourge war and displacement. In the face of this escalating crisis, the Security Council cannot but assume its political, , moral and humanitarian responsibilities to the brotherly Palestinian people and all the peoples of the region.

The Security Council and the international community at large must call the occupying Power to task on its legal and political obligations, including with regard to the provisions of international law and international humanitarian law and norms. In that connection, the Security Council is called upon to assume its responsibility to deter Israel from continuing its aggression before it further escalates the situation in a way that would have consequences of which we are all aware. The Council must do so by adopting a strong, enforceable and comprehensive resolution.

The Arab Group has very carefully crafted its draft resolution to respond to all objective and reasonable elements proposed, as well as to take into account the concerns of everyone. The Group has always been prepared to discuss all the ideas put forth. Given the escalation of the situation and the rising number of victims, the Group of Arab States calls upon the Council to respond positively to the provisions of the draft resolution that the Arab Group has submitted.

In addition to its horrendousness, what is taking place in Gaza should not lead us to forget that the Palestinian territories have suffered from siege and oppression for years. That is the fundamental tragedy that the Palestinian people have experienced for decades. That tragedy has also been subject to Israel's policy of establishing settlements and its ongoing attempts to Judaize Jerusalem and eradicate its Islamic character, to which His Majesty King Mohammed VI has called for an end.

It is high time that the international community assume its historic responsibilities towards the Palestinian people and the other peoples of the region in order to end repeated tragedies and contribute to the establishment of an atmosphere conducive to the resumption and acceleration of negotiations on the right track with a view to reaching a just and comprehensive solution to the problem of the Middle East that ensures Israel's withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State. That requires stepping up efforts to achieve national reconciliation and unity among the Palestinians and the strengthening of their legitimate institutions. The Palestinian people are one people, destined to live in dignity in a land that is united, independent and viable, with East Jerusalem as its capital, side by side with the State of Israel in mutual peace and security and in accordance with international legitimacy, the principle of land for peace, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ahmad bin Abdulla Al-Mahmoud, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar.

Mr. Al-Mahmoud (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting to address the atrocities being committed in the occupied Palestinian Gaza Strip. I would also like to take this opportunity to wish you every success in your presidency of the Council in these difficult circumstances. Through you, Sir, I would also like to extend my thanks to the Secretary-General for his repeated calls to stop the ongoing violence in Gaza. I should also like to express my gratitude to the

President of the General Assembly for his extensive efforts and his fair-minded statement in that regard.

I will not cite the horrendous atrocities committed since 27 December 2008 by the Israeli war machine against the unarmed civilians of the afflicted Palestinian territory, nor will I refer to the killing, destruction, tragedy and violations of every human right that the Security Council has heard of and witnessed as a result of the recent Israeli aggression. Schools, hospitals and places of worship have not been spared the mass destruction resulting from that aggression, which has taken place in blatant violation of the rules of international humanitarian law.

The world has just seen how Israel assassinated more than 40 civilians in cold blood, including women and children, in a school of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. I do not think there is a need to remind the Council about what it has heard over the past few months with regard to the serious consequences of the Israeli siege imposed on the Gaza Strip and the grave humanitarian situation that it has caused. As we approached the new year celebrations, we were hopeful that the world would enjoy a quiet season and that the new year would bring new hopes for a better future. But Israel's position is different from the international community's.

I have come here with my brothers, the Arab ministers, as part of the ministerial committee that the Arab Council of Ministers decided to establish at its extraordinary meeting last Wednesday and to send to New York to urge the Security Council to end its foot- on an issue that poses a direct, clear and serious threat to international peace and security and has also resulted in a dire humanitarian situation. Arab States and other peace-loving countries of the world were unanimous in expressing their solidarity with the Palestinian people in connection with their suffering as a result of Israel's brutal occupation and recent attack on Gaza, and well as in standing by Palestinians in their just struggle to achieve their legitimate and inalienable rights, in particular their right to independence, self-determination and statehood on their own national soil, with Jerusalem as its capital.

We therefore demand that the Security Council assume its responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations and not settle for making press statements, but rather immediately adopt a resolution that compels Israel, the occupying Power, to stop its land, sea and air military aggression on the Gaza Strip; immediately withdraw its forces; lift the siege on Gaza; open the crossings; end the policy of collective punishment; and provide protection for the Palestinian people, including the protection of health and educational institutions that are safe havens, as attacks on such safe havens are illegal.

The reluctance to adopt a resolution in this regard gives a green light to Israel to continue its war crimes, in flagrant violation of the relevant conventions, laws and international norms. Such stalling is incongruent with the mandate of this Council and proves that this important organ is in need of reform.

The international community is not witnessing an ordinary war but a new Israeli aggression, similar to the summer of 2006 aggression on Lebanon, with the most advanced and lethal weapons being used against Palestinian people, in violation of international peace and security. This tragedy strikes at the core of the mandate of this Council, the credibility of which is now being called into question. We have already repeatedly urged the Council and the Quartet to work sincerely towards the implementation of the Council's decisions on peace in the Middle East.

On the other hand, General Assembly resolution 60/1 on the outcome of the 2005 World Summit, and specifically its provisions regarding human security, the responsibility to protect and the culture of peace, requires the United Nations to carry out its duty with respect to protecting the Palestinian people from Israeli aggression. Resolution 1674 (2006) on the protection of civilians in armed conflict requires the United Nations to come to the rescue of the Palestinians and to criminalize the Israeli acts of aggression.

The State of Qatar is eager to do its duty as an active member of the United Nations. His Highness the Emir of the State of Qatar, in his speech on 4 January 2009, which has been issued as a document of the United Nations, called upon the international community to protect and give relief to the Palestinians and emphasized that the killing of innocent civilians and the Israeli military aggression will not bring security neither to Israel nor to us as Arabs, but will instead result in disastrous consequences. Did the people who prepared for this war think of the anger of generations of Arabs and Palestinians, which will only grow as they witness such scenes? How can Israeli

military aggression contribute to the achievement of a lasting and comprehensive peace in the region?

The division, by some, of Palestine into Hamas and Fatah is unacceptable, since the occupation does not distinguish between parties, but is all-encompassing. Therefore, we should not accept any Palestinian national differences as an excuse for Israel to continue its occupation and aggression against a defenceless people, or allow it to use such differences as an excuse to divide the Palestinian people and Palestinian land. We must not punish the Palestinian people for having exercised their right to vote, in accordance with the principles of democracy that we all call for. At this time, we urge the Palestinians to achieve unity and consensus in their plight.

The excuses proffered by Israel concerning Palestinian rocket attacks cannot deceive wise people, although some may think of them as the factor that sparked the current crisis. It must be recalled that the occupation of the Palestinian territory is the cause of the rocket attacks. Consequently, the occupation must end if calm is to be restored. Even if we acknowledge that excluding Hamas is in Israel's best security interests, can we consider as self-defence an all-out military aggression against a densely populated city in which — as the aggressor is aware — the casualties will be civilians?

Israel uses self-defence as a pretext under the United Nations Charter, but the latter gives peoples the right to self-determination and to an end to occupation. Therefore, what Israel is committing is genocide and ethnic cleansing carried out by an entity that claims to be representing democracy and freedom.

In conclusion, we are facing an extremely difficult humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory. While we thank all peace-loving nations for standing with the Palestinian people in their plight, we call on all donors to contribute urgently, to provide more humanitarian assistance and to support relief organizations operating in the Gaza Strip. Allow me to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the efforts of those institutions, especially the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, in carrying out their humanitarian duty in a dangerous work environment.

The State of Qatar has been among the leading supporters of the Palestinian people at the bilateral level, through the decisions of the Council of the League of Arab States and through the United Nations. We have recently sent aid to the Palestinians by sea and air. We strongly support their just cause, as we will not allow the brotherly Palestinian people to be brought to its knees.

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with the agreement reached by the Security Council in its prior consultations, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to suspend this meeting until tomorrow at 11 a.m.

The meeting was suspended at 9 p.m.